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Aug/Sept 1976

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THE DRAMA THEATRE

Raymond Omodio

Vol 1 No 1



PLAYTEXT REG BY JENNIFER RUMBLE
RICHARD WETHERET INTERVIEWED
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AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

ISSN 8313 2083

Aug/Sep 1976

EDITORS: Bruce Knappett Robert Page

Asst: Lucy Wagner

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA is published by Theatre Publications Ltd, 2 President Place, New Lambton Heights, New South Wales 2305. Tel 049 5293761 on the 15th of every month. It is distributed by subscription and through theatre agents etc., by Theatre Publications and its newsletters throughout Australia by Gordon and Gordon (Aust) Ltd., MELBOURNE SYDNEY. Advertising rates on application. Printed by Navvy & Beach Printers Pty. Ltd., 10 Bellard Street, Broadmeadow, 2292, Newcastle, New South Wales.

Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts and other material supplied for this magazine, the publishers and their agents accept no liability for loss or damage which may occur. Unpublished manuscripts and other material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

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Editorial

THEATRE AUSTRALIA, the first national monthly theatre magazine to be published in Australia, has been launched to answer an urgent and ever growing need for comprehensive coverage and informed critique. The magazine is broadly based and will be of interest to a wide range of people, theatre goers, theatre practitioners, theatre principals, students, educationists and TIE groups, film and television enthusiasts and indeed anyone concerned for the development of the arts in Australia.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA presents a national listing of professional productions, sound reviews of leading playwrights' productions and in depth articles on current concerns. The magazine also concerns itself with theatre education, new technical trends and issues from theatre books. Theatre news appears in Quebec and Quebec and writers abroad give a round up of trends in their country for the international section. A Classified section will keep the production houses of advanced plays and in the Film, Television, and Radio drama sections professionals will be giving insight behind-the-scenes analysis.

THEATRE AUSTRALIA exists solely on sales. Without the general support of the theatres the magazine would not exist. Our special thanks go to the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Nimrod Theatre Company and the Australian Performing Group for giving benefit rights to ensure a successful launching, and to Edgley's, Roach and the Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association for practical help and support. **THEATRE AUSTRALIA** now depends on your support if it is to continue its task of chronicling and consolidating our national theatre culture.

This month

This month we feature Raymond Gremer's article on the Drama Theatre at the Opera House, a theme which has never yet been seriously examined in print by those who have worked in it. The playtext in the controversial *Item* by Jennifer Rankin, and Anne Valdez reveals the plausibility and problems of being a wife and actress in a personal relationship with director, Richard Wherrett.

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Note: Subscriptions fall due on July 1st each year

Theatre Guide

NEW SOUTH WALES:

ACTORS COMPANY (680 2903)

Play It Again Sam by Woody Allen
Directed by Rodger Doherty (to Sept. 18th);
Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett
Directed by Rodney Doherty (from Sept. 22nd).

BONDI PAVILION (30 7241)

Sense of Difference by Morris Stedman
Directed by John Denham (July 20th - Aug 31st).

CAPITOL THEATRE (212 4198)

Jesus Christ Superstar Rock/Weber
Directed by Steven Heng
Choreographed by Christopher Kalter
(continuing).

ENSEMBLE (929 887)

Commodore by Trevor Gottschalch
Directed by Hayes Gordon (continuing).

HER MAJESTY'S (212 1066)

Man of La Mancha
Directed by Betty Pashler (no dates available).

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY, NEWCASTLE (26 2626)

Swallows by Barry Oakley
Directed by Michael Pollic (from Aug 6th);
A Happy and Holy Obsession by John O'Donoghue
Directed by Terence Clarke (Premiere 10th Sept).

INDEPENDENT (929 7377)

The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon
Directed by David Goldfarb.

MARIAN STREET (498 3188)

Coil (Coie Foster)
Directed by Alastair Duncan.
Choreographed by Karen Johnson (to Aug 21st).

In Praise of Love by Terence Rattigan
Directed by Michael Gasson (from Aug 26th - Oct 2nd).

MUSIC HALL THEATRE RESTAURANT (809 8222)

The Heart of Belgrave Square by Stanley Welsh
Directed by Stanley Welsh (continuing).

NIMROD (69 6003)

Upstage (The Recruiting Officer) by George Farquhar
Directed by Ken Horler (to Sept. 20th).

DOWNTOWN *The Education of Benjamin Franklin* by Steve J. Spiro
Directed by Richard Wherrett (from Aug 25th).

OLD TOTE (663 6122)

Drama Theatre *The Shoemakers Holiday* by Thomas Dekker
Directed by Peter Collingwood (to Sept. 7th);
The Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen (from Sept. 15th).

Parade Theatre *Osterville Engaged* by Simon Gray (to Sept. 21st).

O THEATRE (92 5011)

Jean by Alan Owen
Directed by Adam Soifer.

THEATRE ROYAL

Black Theatre of Prague (Aug 23rd to Sept. 4th).

Sense Time Next Year by Morris Stedman
Directed by Gordon Hunt (from Sept. 18th).

THE STABLES (31 1111)

Dear by Jennifer Rankin
Directed by Nigel Thrift (Premiere) (No dates available).

QUEENSLAND

HER MAJESTY'S

Black Theatre of Prague (from Sept. 28th).

LA BOITE (36 2296)

What's Mine Is Mine by Peter Weston
Directed by Ross Bellingshaw (Premiere) (to Aug 28th).

Happy Birthday Wanda June by Kurt Vonnegut (from Sept. 2nd).

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (21 3881)

The Duperrier by David Williamson
Directed by Jim McCullum (to Sept. 4th).

A Touch of Mischief by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Alan Edwards (from Sept. 15th).

TWELFTH NIGHT THEATRE (52 5889)

Gandy Dick by A.W. Pinero
Directed by John Whalley (no dates available).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

HER MAJESTY'S

Black Theatre of Prague (from Sept. 28th).

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (51 5151)

Major Barbara by G.B. Shaw
Directed by George Ogden (to Sept. 11th);
The Last of the Knickerbockers by John Powers
Directed by David Williamson (from Sept. 18th).

VICTORIA

COMEDY

Sense Time Next Year by Morris Stedman
Directed by Gordon Hunt (to Sept. 18th).

Black Theatre of Prague (from Sept. 14th).

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (646 1100)

Russell Street (Ostville) by W. Shakespeare
Directed by John Sumner (to Aug. 31st).

A Masjid of Friends by David Williamson
Directed by Rodney Fisher (no dates available).

St. Mark's *Sons of My Best Friends are Women* by LM Radic
Directed by Ray Lawler (to Sept. 14th).

The Name by Eduardo Mendoza
Directed by Ian Giles (no dates available).

Great Street *The Powerhouse* by EA Whitehead
Directed by Steven Hepplewhite (to Aug. 21st).

Everyman by Niccolò Machiavelli
Directed by Andrew Ross (from Aug. 24th).

On Your Knees by Ray Lawler
Directed by John Sumner (Albury, Sale, Mildura - Aug. 23rd; Sept. 8th).

PRAM FACTORY (347 7133)

AC/DC by Heathcote Williams
Directed by Lynette Smith (continuing).

Kissaki by David Head
Directed by Alan Robertson (to Sept. 11th).

The Divorcée by Jack Hibberd
Directed by Tim Robertson (no dates available).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2403)

The Trial and Appeal Fund
Adapted and Directed by Malcolm Keith (from Aug. 8th).

The Ride Across Lake Georgetown by Peter Handke
Directed by Sally Holmes (Sept. 15th - 18th).

PLAYHOUSE (26 3344)

Albert Coopers by Alan Bennett
Directed by Anne Nevin (to Sept. 4th).

QUOTES

11 Reassessment of some of J.C.W.'s operations is more inevitable because of the government decision to reject our short-term application to the J.C.W. We are very disappointed and will be making the detailed case in the light of this at our August Board meeting. The long-term will remain uncertain until the report on theatres, deferred until November, is published. **J.C.W.**
Alexander Mitchell, Managing Director of J.C.W., Wilkeson's

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

12 The change in life-style involved in shifting over from being a full-time teacher to being a full-time writer struck the old psyche a bit. I really liked the experience of directing *Gombboori* for the A.P.G. in 1973 and any chance I get to involve myself in close personal contact, to relate to a group of people, by directing it jump at it. As a writer I freely enjoy. And I've always loved the play — it's bloody good! **J.C.W.**

David Williamson, playwright, who is directing John Pascoe's *A Year of the Krays* for the South Australian Theatre Company in September

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

13 The Shubert is getting a lot of good crits, a lot of good audiences. In losing money hand over fist and should survive until next March. Lunchtime and six o'clock were a gross failure; late night shows a surprising success, and original Australian material. Eight o'clock shows evenly divided between off-shore near-western pieces (*Down Under* and *The Gift*) and egocentric rockneys (*Tony Wilson* and *Alfredo*). We are still in business but deeply bruised by editor TV and the twenty-four other live professional theatres so relentlessly functioning round Sydney. **Beth, Elyse and Anne Brookbank, owners of The Shubert**

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

14 Rodney Fuhr's nominal directing load whilst Associate Director for the South Australian Theatre Company was two plays per season — and that's just as many as he'll be doing when he returns to us as a freelance artist in residence. Responsibilities of administration will be replaced with those of the writer/director, which will be between Scott and Strode — a documented history of the Unfinished Adversary Committee in the '40s and '50s — for the Theatre Go-Round programme which takes performance out into the Adelaide community, and the other will be Mervin his own selection of the Webster play — a shorter and more accessible version for the Raythwaite audience. **J.C.W.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

15 The Playwrights' Conference is hoping to move into a second stage of operation after four National Conferences. This stage may take the form of assistance with readings and short productions of new plays throughout the year, and is aimed at giving continual encouragement to Australian playwrights, with the Conference as the focal point. **J.C.W.**
Helen van der Poorten, Australian National Playwrights' Conference

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

16 Roger Chapman, one of England's leading EIF experts has recently joined S.A.T.C. as Director of Youth Activities from Monday August 1st. He is not only writing with first performances for children as well as holding special workshops for teachers of creative drama for primary schools. He has replaced Helmut Birkat. **S.A.T.C.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

17 If Perth were London, Brisbane would be Siberia. **J.C.W.**

from the QTAC Newsletter

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

AND

18 I look forward to returning to freelance directing and acting. Since I became generally known that I was leaving (in November) I have been constantly questioned about the Tate by people whose only interest has been what driving force I might have to tell. They might as well save their breath. My association with the Company has been a happy one. Of course we have had our disagreements — generally about the use of play to be done — but that has been healthy and necessary ones. There is something to be legitimate in any job worth doing. Many of the things I have wanted to do haven't materialised but these frustrations are due to financial and personnel obstructions and I believe I may have paved the way to their realisation in the future.

I am home to live in Australia, accepting as works and all, and contrary to reports I am always receiving. I have no intention of leaving. I love working with the actors here and would stay for that reason alone. **J.C.W.**

19 Bill Redmond, Artistic Director, Old Rose Theatre Company: Bill Redmond will be looking at the very few forward for Australian theatre in the next issue.]

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

20 Prior to Robin Loveloy's retirement in December 1974, from the position of Artistic Director of the Old Rose Theatre Company the company had a policy of retaining a permanent artistic director plus resident directors on either one or two year contracts.

When the time came to appoint a successor to Robin Loveloy the company's directors decided that the policy set for the resident directors should be adhered to in relation to the post of Artistic Director pro tem — e.g. a short term contract with an option for further extension of appointment.

This was implemented upon the appointment of William Redmond whose two year term of office expires in November 1978. By design and with great good fortune it was felt that the company would be better able to meet the changing conditions that the theatrical profession on might have to face. It would be possible to introduce new ideas and new directions much more quickly should these be necessary. The question of continuity within company structure operation was also examined closely and it was decided that by staggering the appointment of the artistic director and the resident directors, suitable overlaps would occur that would maintain a cohesive policy. A supplementary development the company is contemplating in the near future is the introduction of another form of contracted directorship. The company anticipates being able to form a commitment with local and overseas directors on a retainer basis. It is hoped that by introducing a twelve month contract spread over two or four years we would be able to entice directors to form a relationship with the company that will be both stimulating and exciting for artists and the theatre going public. By this arrangement the company would be able to contract them for a full twelve month or two year period which would remove them completely from the sphere of operations in which they work in either Europe or Australia.

The method is new to Australia in the drama field though customary in the fields of opera, ballet and orchestral world. In the custom has been for the long term appointment of an artistic director but it is felt that the innovation is worth consideration if it means a more stimulating and viable form of presentation for our audiences and the extension of the skills of our artists by the introduction of new thinking and the latest methods in use overseas. **J.C.W.**
Ken Southgate, General Manager of the Old Rose Theatre Company

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

How does the situation stand where live theatre and the Australian Opera are starting to run short of funds — no increases in hire costs and consequent threat of partial or complete closure — when the Film and TV Board of the Australian Council can still it would seem give out as much? Witness Lillian Miller's transfer from Naraco to Redding Town Hall Arts Centre to establish an access centre entirely (and substantially) funded by the Film and TV Board. Is this a follow Whiteman trend, or does it show a shift in emphasis with the current Government? Does Harry Miller's move reflect more than the instinct of one entrepreneur?

PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD HODGSON

QUERIES

nimrod theatre

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Nimrod downstairs.

Would you believe **GORDON CHATER** in *The Elopement of Benjamin Franklin* by Steve J. Sosen. He's fat, fifty and quite content with his Mick Jagger fantasies and his stockbroker mate till his 12 year old education pupil tries to seduce them and the forces of light descend on the Transvestite Terror of Double Bay. Director is Richard Wherrett, designer Larry Eastwood and it opens August 26th.



Nimrod upstairs.

... a big, fizzy production of George Faquhar's very modern late Restoration piece about vendettas, sex, women's roles, whoring and recruiting — *The Recruiting Officer*. It's warm and witty and the first play ever performed in Australia — in 1709 by connects "in a red hot fizz up for the occasion". The all star cast includes PETER CARROLL (The Christian Brothers and Snoddick in *Magh Ail*), IVAR KANTS (The Duke in *Magh Ail* and the Lazarus's brother in *Mounting Becomes Electus*), LYNETTE CURRAN (Martello Towers), CAROL BURNS (The Macho-queen) and JOHN GAGEN (Transvestite). Director is Ken Horler and it plays until September 26th.

THE RECRUITING OFFICER

Reviews

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP

AC/DC

John Smythe

AC/DC by Richard Murphy, Douglas Lennox Smith, Michael McMillan, Michael Murphy, John Mervin, Peter Mervin, Steve Carol Porter, Sam Lafferty, Melvyn Morris, Jane Clifton
Directed by Douglas Lennox Smith
Music by Michael Murphy
Lighting by Michael Murphy
Costumes by Steve Carol Porter
Sets by Sam Lafferty
Movement by Melvyn Morris
Music by Jane Clifton

"Get a led a hammer and suddenly everything needs hammering."

Toss in and clamp your inter-locking bream-buzz-suspension on that old Dudes because it's one of the very few unremitting non-examined alienations around us, by the triple reality media freak out we called otherwise known as a play called AC/DC which was written by Heathcote Williams in the late 1960's first produced at this Royal Court Theatre London in 1970 and now beginning in oh Australia for the first time having been programmed by the Australian Performing Group today through July at the Picnic Bay where their outfit splits in two visiting the back part of the front theatre (AC) and the back theatre (DC) — which when you make the mistake of thinking about it most mean Theatre Projects is waiting for godot on the off-maintained circus which is probably neither here nor there but if it gets you a beard and you want to pick up on that top men then do I like you know whatever it has you on right but little cool dig and don't waste energy don't know a ting there it's so much around to get into.

AC/DC is a powerful, pulsating, high frequency sometimes magnetic sometimes shocking even so rocking constantly sparking theatrical charge which cracks and picks up on phenomena that were especially current or at least come into sharp focus around the time it was written. References to the Beatles and Kennedy date it a bit but although we might let by golly take nowadays with acid rock atrope light and super amplified sound show as once we were much of what remains more than half a decade later is very much the same only more so.

The kids who have got hold of electronic media technology and more importantly the

power source controllers who have got hold of them and are not holding one bit, continue to hammer relentlessly at our already battered and dulled sensibilities. The multi-million megawatt manipulators purveyors perverts or prophets of bigger and better brain-busting experiences. Prodding and prodding away at cerebral canyons, coming up cuts, psycho-analysis and therapy via spaced spirations, the inspirational sensualism. Their neatly packaged reality flashes — noised upon all others activities poised in somewhere between anticlastic comedy show political whitewash exercises and the latest sports results — serve largely to attract us to their satellites. Williams calls them psyched capitalists.

All that has created a bizarre sub-culture where being a freak is a strategy for survival. Sade (Carol Porter) needs to keep spaced out so she can longer sit the shivvers (eg. South Africa). She is into anything and everything if it promises something new. Since she believes that no emotion is worth having unless it has a relentless upward one-way search for ultimate pure sensation. Melody (Jane Clifton) and Gary (Larry Miller) assume to be the kids of the past. Good time gringers with tons of energy looking for dynamic experiences to flip fat out on. They are a zig-zag happy strangos getting a blast from an amusement arcade — until Sade breaks the three way buzz by hitting on Maurice. The intransigent mechanics vibes threatened alienated out of their slot. Melody and Gary leave. They don't make it from AC to DC.

Maurice (Richard Murphy) though, among other things, constantly paranoid about people stealing his electricity. He used to have a physical relationship with a girl called Petronella (Philip Mervin) but now they are having into each other's heads. Petronella suffers bodily from seriously overload. Maurice seems dependent on Petronella and seems to want to make Petronella dependent on him.

In DC, Sade sets out to help Petronella having got rid of Maurice (meaning interpersonal hypocrisies of her love life because he had a Christ Complex, he says she followed him out). Her quest for a completely out-of-line state that no one else if able to copy or duplicate goes into its final phase. She performs a frightening operation on Petronella re-births a baby in the back of his abu-



Carol Porter (Sade) in A.P.G.'s AC/DC

Apparently Astaco, Spanish miners, Dutch and Greeks used to do it to relieve pressure on the brain or release endorphins. In Sade's hands it is the ultimate mind fuck.

It is an astounding play. And this production of it (directed by Ursus Smith) is intelligent, dynamic, committed and thorough. Very few audience members could become emotionally involved but that is as it should be. It would be hypocritical for it to mind-fuck us as well. Nevertheless, we do get bombarded a lot with tattered technological jargon and aesthetic references. That the actors have made sense of it all for themselves is a great achievement. No doubt their raised our collective tolerance level well above what it might have been. But some observers will still feel to make much contact in it. Others might pick up on so much as fast that they too will suffer sensory overload. Per me it was a total scan and pick up on bits here and there. Spectator is the best that can be achieved in this setting, and I at least, from what details I remember, did that very well.

But bummer, bummer bummer whatever way's going for individual audience members the APG must be congratulated for taking the risk and fulfilling their part of the task as well.



Richard Murphy (Maurice), Carol Porter (Sade), Larry Miller (Gary) and Jane Clifton (Melvyn) in A.P.G.'s AC/DC

Michael Edgley

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John Powers

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KNUCKLEMEN**

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Paul Zindel

**AND MISS REARDON
DRINKS A LITTLE**

Directed by George Ogilvie
October 14 - November 6



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QUEENSLAND THEATRE

COMPANY

SAVAGES

Richard Fotheringham

SAVAGES by Christopher Hampton, directed by Alan Edwards. Opened 21/7/76 | Queen's Theatre, Hay Street, Perth. Set Design: Peter Gould. Choreography: Ray Stoen. Lighting: Alan Edwards. Music: Alan Edwards. Stage Manager: KATE WILSON. Casting: Christopher Hampton. **CAST:** ALAN EDWARDS, MARY ANN, KATE WILSON, CARLOS RODRIGUEZ, PETER WEST, MIKE TURNER, DOUGLAS HEDGES, DENISE VAN DYKSON, ROBERT COOPER, JEFF LADDON, ANTHONY QUINN, RICHARD BROWN, GUY COOKE, CLIVE DUNN, ROBIN ELLIOTT, ROB FLEMING, STEPHEN JONES, JEFFREY KIRK, ROB LEWIS, PETER LEE, JAMES BURTON, PHIL MORRIS, ROBNA, SARAH DYNES, DENICE GREGORY, HELEN HAMILTON, RACHEL HASTHORN, MICHAEL HOBBS, ROBIN KELLY, ROBIN METACUCHIN, PHIL MOYSE, BRUCE PALEY, GENE POWELL.

In 1973 the British critics applauded two major new plays, Peter Shaffer's *Equivocals* and Christopher Hampton's *Savages*. The former has become the most popular play of the seventies with sell-out seasons from Bangkok to Brisbane. *Savages*, which had bowed in many of the New Play of the Year awards, has rarely been performed at all.

The reasons for this are not difficult to guess at. *Equivocals* is a masterly piece of psychological theater written as a small, tight subtext, carefully planned and executed to hold and build audience suspense. *Savages* is a heterogeneous epic-like narrative which cleaves roughly at three areas: the overt and covert attempts by industrial nations to lift off indigenous savages who get in the way of progress; the aims and activities of the urban guerrilla movements who are fighting on behalf of the starving and oppressed masses of the Third World; and the apposition by overseas (particularly American) capitalists which is causing that misery and alienation.

The play has three subplot elements which are intertwined with dramatic but non-hierarchical logic. The first is a series of scenes in which an English diplomat stationed in Brazil relates various myths which he has collected from the last-existential remnants of the Amazon Indians. These narratives are accompanied by the enactment of myths, rituals, and dances by actors representing those Indians. The second element concerns conservators whom the diplomat Alan West (played in the GTC production by their artistic director, Alan Edwards) has with various authorities to conduct his quest for information about the Indians and their plight. He is sum of the policy of genocide which is being vigorously pursued by foreign companies who want to make a

quick buck exploiting the Amazon. The Indian Protection Service, anthropologists, missionaries, and the World Press, have failed to do anything about the massacres. The Brazilian Government, one of the most severely repressive military dictatorships in the world, is actively encouraging the genocide.

The third, and core element of the play involves the kidnapping of West by a group of urban guerrillas. Carlos, one of the leaders, is assigned to guard West and the two strike up an acquaintance. Carlos is fond of quoting Camus, Fanon, Che, and the dead Brazilian guerrilla Carlos Montenegro. West, still preoccupied with Indians, comes into contact with Rousseau. Carlos is not particularly interested in Indians, for his movement has larger aims securing the release of political prisoners, overthrowing the fascists regime, and liberating the millions of peasants and workers whose standard of living is declining daily under the onslaught of foreign domination and West, the bourgeois and public documents, accept Carlos's friendship but is unable to follow him in argument about these larger realities. If the guerrillas have no special interest in the fate of the Indians, then he cannot accept their remedies.

For the author, Christopher Hampton, writing the play was clearly a personal voyage of discovery. He began by reading a newspaper account of how paid assassins had bombed a tribal ceremony, mix this with other indirect sources fashioned most of strands one and two of his story. The third element emerged only after he had visited Brazil and it is here that both the political and dramatic weakness of his script lies. Not knowing enough about it in hindsight is an admission, as where the problems — both in script and production — start.

Mr. Hampton's problem is that his play invites political discussion and concern, and is going to attract people (myself included) who

are more concerned with his observations on society than with the necessities of art, more concerned with the facts of life in Latin America than with the personal fate of his characters. And by having the character of Carlos able and conveniently open up the dimensions of the play by telling us of her pressing and watershed social evils Mr. Hampton opens a window on reality which is inevitable to close, and which upsets his play.

The final stage of the play is a perfect example. Carlos shoots West, and world press headlines announce the fact as his body lies in a spotlight. Simultaneously a pile of Indian bodies (bombed in the massacre mentioned above) are shown — grislyghish! It's a fine image, a telling one, and quite tragic. The massacre was reported. The play switched over to the living workers and peasants of Latin America, suffering under military dictatorship torture, Death Squads, rampant inflation, multi-national companies, and the World Bank. Carlos leaves West and runs out of the door and out of the play and Hampton opts for a concluding tragedy à la Sartrean rather than a statement of truth and of continuing struggle (see the GTC production, directed by Murray Fox) or both the present and coming night performances.

Basically, I suppose it's silly for a state-supported plush bourgeois theatre — which exists primarily because paying right audience members are there — to pretend to education an Australian aristocracy of taste as well as wealth and power — to entertain a play which it played with intellectual and political gulf width contrast that audience with their own lied, complicity in mass murder, and oppression. That the GTC can do so without realising their state failure is a measure partly of Mr. Hampton's own naivety of his play's inadequacy, but mainly of the GTC's ability to alter the focus of the play from politics to psychology, to turn a statement about how the world works at present into a study of





Alan Edwards (Miles West) and Peter Kowar (Carlos Esquivel) in GTC's *Savages*

deviant and obsessive behaviour to turn Savages into a poor imitation of Equus.

For the play with all its faults, is still gutsy stuff with occasional gems of observation and argument. Carlos's argument, which opens that window I alluded to earlier and allows us to escape from the boundaries of tragedy, is one such gem:

All your liberal hearts bleed at the thought of those poor naked savages fading away, but it never begins to dribble tears over apathy has a mind that half a million children under five starved to death in Brazil last year.

But straight it's a devastating statement, but the GTC puts it in weather context. West's heart-music of Carlos's pronouncements, with condescending disregard interspersed with relentless foot-shifting and fidgeting at his hands — a level of egomaniacalism more appropriate to the Art of Coarse Acting than to an intelligent exchange of ideas. Add to this a portrayal of Carlos as a heavily-recycled knew-and-unconscious youth who stammers unconvincingly whenever challenged on a point of political dogma, and a general tendency by all the actors to seek an emotional intimacy by pauses and odd inflections, and we end up with

a production where the characters are not merely savages — for instance how an unfortunate tendency to say things that are true — but savages whose every instance has a subjective rather than objective meaning. West's stage comes across as relatively 'young', and it allows the play to move away — urban, small-minded, and incapable of action — to become the voice of the play.

The next step in the process of decolonisation is the choice of a naturalistic measure of presentation whereby attention is paid to people they know nothing about. It makes possible the one moment in the production which is deeply offensive to any intelligent human being. It occurs in the scene where West visits the American missionary and meets their disabled leaders. For most of the play the Indians are names and catchphrases but in this scene ten adults in very specialised person shuffle on to the stage, and indulge in a series of acts humiliatingly hybridised. West has found this most offensive and deeply irritating. Not more than a mile from the GTC Theatre, two members of their oppressed race who could be (and have been by other theatre companies in the past called upon to play these roles) the production would

then take them on and gently allow them to make clear that real suffering, real oppression, takes place now, today, in Brazil — and in Australia.

The parallel is not macabrely buried. What the移到 nations found in the Americas was because the companies involved are Atoch Rio Tinto Zinc and Kenesha (the Comptac partners) and Billiton (part of Shell Oil). Each in the same three campaigns the Queensland government has allowed to mine bisbee in Cape York Peninsula where the Maori aborigines were kicked off their land and their houses burnt, where Wimpa was desecrated and the blacks turned into dispossessed fringe dwellers, and where the Australian conservatives now insist interestingly enough Billiton (the major partner in Australian Associates), was mining in Brazil in 1983 — in the same area and in the same year that the bombing massacre took place. It does not prospecting rights in the Indian Reserve where the survivors were sent in 1972 (where were hired by whom is unknown) to massacre the rest of the tribe.

Really there is only the Queensland politicians, public servants, and capitalists in the opening night audience had to be presented from and the GTC rose successfully to the challenge.

Hole In the Wall Theatre

HAMLET

Collin O'Brien

HAMLET by William Shakespeare (Last August 1986)
Directed by RICHARD DRAKE; Associate Director, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH;
Choreographer, BILL COX; Set Design, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH;
Music, MICHAEL KIRK; Period Costumes, VICTORIA GIBSON;
Lighting, IAN HAYES; Sound, PAUL JONES; Stage Manager, ROBINSON;
Production Office, TREVOR THOMAS; Stage Manager, CLARE;
Properties, ANDY KING; Casting, BARBARA GUNN;
House, Stage, Set, Researcher, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH; Production Office, DOUGLAS THOMPSON; Open Stage Associate, 2nd Stage, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH; Artistic Associate, 2nd Stage, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH;
Properties, 2nd Stage, Artistic Associate, 2nd Stage, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH;
Management, 2nd Stage, Artistic Associate, 2nd Stage, STEPHEN MACKINTOSH;



Malcolm Keith (Hamlet) and Barbara Danvers (Ophelia) in the Hole in the Wall's Hamlet



Bill Considine as Claudius

While the National Theatre at the Playhouse spent June doing its duty by the schools with Aeneas Neuma's production of Robert Bolt's post-medieval parable *A Man for All Seasons*, Perth's smaller professional theatre, the Hole in the Wall, presented us with a truly stunning *Hamlet*.

The play was directed by experienced Westraian Raymond Omodeo, especially rewarding for the person. Mr Omodeo's achievement was based on a perfect adaptation of the scale and style of playing Hamlet to the theatrical environment in which he and his eleven players were working. The Hole in the Wall seats only one hundred and fifty people. In such intimate circumstances consistent effects are unconsiderable; what we were given instead was low key but pert, delivered, and great intensity of playing in terms of bassoon of artifice. The *Hamlet* was meeting.

As programme notes Mr Omodeo gives us some quotations from *The Politics of Experience* by F. D. Laing. Personally I have recently acquired programme notes on the ground that they all too easily become attack which critics attack characters. However in this case the references to Laing's points were very much to the purpose. The Laingian point which Omodeo applies to *Hamlet* has to do with the idea that what our experience is classified as like the source of our own identity. In the world of this *Hamlet*, the murder and its results have destroyed the existence of the universe as the characters see it. Claudius cannot live with his guilt, and his mother's marriage and the discovery of the murder destroys the world as Hamlet knows it.

It is this vision of the world of Hamlet which is made explicit in the production. It is not just Hamlet's time which is out of joint, the murder has corrupted the whole society. Anyone who knows Ross Omodeo is aware of his love for Greek tragedy, and this *Hamlet* has during this production turned to not merely the

personal tragedy of a prince but to the House of Akers, it is in tribute to the depth of the character's vision and his skill in making it come to life on stage.

Claudius, for instance, was not your usual nasty version of the Laughing Cavalier. I have always held the common notion of Claudius as being bony and lecherous, so decided to advise the casting in the role of lecherous and more amorous styled performer Bill Durnane. But this performance in the present context was absolutely convincing. This Claudius could not live with his guilt; he was not besotted with Gertrude but had already married her to secure the kingship. Taking the power seems to a joy, I have always seen Claudius as a drift for Macbeth and Mr Durnane's chilling performance reinforced this view. Janine McLean as Gertrude gave a fine study of a woman who, until the closest scene refused to face even the possibility of the murder after that she was herself on the part of soliloquy having between the histrionic and the comic.

When bringing in the central performance that of Malcolm Keith as Hamlet. From the first time I saw him act — as the entertainment ethicist John Romeo's *The Abusing World* — I have been impressed with Mr Keith's artistry as an actor. And I knew that he would make a laudable and thumping Hamlet. But I was pleased with an extra dimension. Mr Keith never failed for a moment to convey what was happening, logically and vulnerably. It was not only a fine emotional performance, but one of great intelligence.

I will dwell no further on individual performances at length, only say that the whole company acted with great skill and commitment. There was also double by Trevor Hayes, Glen Heathcote, Andy King, Douglas Thompson and James Regan. We even had Neville Beeldt who played an astutely polished and foxy Polonius, resonant as the antiseptics in the graveyard scene. But there was no

over, attempt at academically meaningful doubtless although there were some non-gratuitous ones. Twisted Hero is the closest, the Plaza King and Fortunate for instance. I also liked Steven Lee's steady and thoughtful Horatio (he never looked as though the part could have as well been played by a well-pruned Labrador dog), and a nicely paired Dehaven like Barbara Dennis.

And a number of turbulent enterprises were carried on the road. Hermit passing his life back was Oystaine's handle at the end of the narrative; some four or five years in the play scenes, his color black only to find him in a lighter-colored short pecket, half his face made up as an actor and a plenty yellow humor. Potters not paid nearly satisfied, but the blood spattered corpse Hamlet's furious stabbing of the swine suggested Gertrude, near breaking point, telling of the drowning of Oystaine at court, through which broke from time to tell more hyperbolized anguish. Yorick's skull not your usual dead medieval student infant but half rotten ivy, and finally a design touch, the first appearance of Claudius and Gertrude as court in leprosy off-white brocade challenging last week's black aquamarine.

I could go on indefinitely extolling the felicities of this production, from the clear, thoughtful direction to the fine ensemble singing and even the spare cutting of the last scene since performance stressed less cutting than usual. But what finally remains as my indelible and unforgettable memory in the theatre is that intensity with which the leftmost one still moment is set through waiting for something exciting to happen, what happens is Maister's visit at the point — how it happened were in compelling and finally ecstatic suspense.

Callin Q. Maren

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Great Plants as Mass Swarms in the Old Forests

Bennett's play is a jolly romp of Gilbert and Sullivan — come out into the permissive society as Ben Bowers has recently with his success. The died before Fatherly Husband and wife cast about in all directions before sensibly reuniting themselves. Mr. Iggy the marriage bed. The natural desire of bosoms and lap-pineapple is a little gentle reminder that both the son's successes in love hangs on his having a fatal disease and in a final discovery some the perceptive wisdom of the Colonial Service finds the step-father of her child — the product of a chance encounter at an air raid.

Over all presides Mrs. Swellie, the ubiquitous domineering lady, a sensible Puck in the jungle of the Home Counties.

Getting back to Alan Seymour, he was much taken with Dr. Arthur Winketted & put down of his son:

Arthur Trevor?

Felicity I thought his name was Dennis.

Arthur Then I must you're right.

This becomes a needless org. we do the same. I suppose that is what is known as the permissive society — which encompasses each compromising situation.

The Dennis joke was naturally enough incomprehensible to David Williamson. Only someone who had lived in Brum, said Alan, could joke whilst a querulous definition like that of generations of middle class parents loathing at their children, I guess!

He deplores its hopelessness with the tourist trade a culture to him too very much at an angle of the British about themselves and Bennett's style has a peculiar voyeur quality reminiscent of an infantile Timidity — undergraduate indeed, as Williamson said. Thus

Bruce Berry (Winketted) and Dennis Orio (Fellow) in *Hedda Gabler*



Keith Lee (as Percy), Bruce Berry (Winketted) and Dennis Orio (Fellow) in *Hedda Gabler*

one of those plays about how Mother Brown has gone over the hill without having say but on the way every character is obscene. He goes into it on the truism of life and death, sex, bosses and responsibility. Is Bennett saying then it is not the decline of the British Empire but the maturing of us? That's what has made Britain a second class nation?

Or that we as may, against my pilgrimage to Hedda Gabler, have arrived in Sydney in the Picadilly Theatre and not only has been playing to capacity houses there but will transfer on July 25 to the Theatre Royal. At present there is no sign of six box office presold tickets, but they don't laugh much in the Dennis joke.

It is an extravagant race around production by Alexander Hey with a Luna Park kind of set by Jossie Hopkins and a first rate cast. Bruce Berry plays Arthur Winketted with a smooth elegance, looking unashamedly like the tenor singer of the Old Tote, Robert Quilter. As his wife Dorothy Vernon is a nubile comic partner in spangled English-style. Robert Flanagan is a chameleon actor who gives me great pleasure and his Dennis is the very model of a madcap major failure. Gwen Plumb as Mrs. Swellie and Ruth Dracknell as the belligerent Constance and involved Roswell falls as the resounding sensualist Carson Thrush and Judi Ferriss, the formidable widow Lady Brangwen, play immensely roles they have been playing all their professional lives. To them are added Keith Lee as the head of the S.M.A. Gordon McCrae as a false become salesman Dennis Orio as a middle-aged and Ross Dallas as his dad.

It was very enjoyable and as incomprehensible in direction to me here as it was in London. I polished over its success. Much of it lies in its theatricality. The average audience tends to see the mechanics of theatre to be required to use their imagination to witness, as with the Major General in *The Pirates of Penzance*, that he is demonstrating great skill in singing as fast and dancing too. It is demonstrative theatre like the hens in *Coupe* which make the play a spectacle. He

wherever it is performed. What subtlety of real content a play may have — as indeed David Williamson discovered that time with *The Rainmaker* — is lost irretrievably in this sea change forced upon it by success. What we have here is Hedda Gabler as a matress, poking of fun in the clothes of British sexism, making the same points that are always made in a whimsical, robust manner. But the play has undoubtedly found its right home with the Old Tote's unashamedly middle class and largely middle aged audience. And that is the secret of success. How many of us have abandoned those little hang-ups?

The Old Tote has had a remarkably good year in the box office and reflects the offices of the present artistic director Bill Redmond who regrettably is leaving this post in November. He will still be working with the company as a trainee director. Mr. Redmond was appointed, according to the board, for his knowledge of the commercial theatre in Sydney in being seen pragmatically that the Grand Theatre at the Opera House was inevitably a house for tourists. Increasingly programme books his predecessor, in his opinion, some is to let him have the public bookings and it seems something of a disaster that the Tote is to lose her just when he is at last showing us what he can do. Whether the Tote should be run on such commercial lines is a question for the public and the Australian Council but certainly success within those walls has always been equated with the seats sold rather than the quality achieved. Sydney has almost no legitimate commercial theatre these days now that J.C. Williamson has almost shut up shop and the Old Tote is taking the crown. And good luck to it. Despite the cut backs from the trustees the Tote is looking better than it has for years. Who will keep the hot seat is now the question. One answer is that it will be somebody but that, those who ready pull the strings in that institution or a person who comes out front will show themselves. When will the Tote board stop cutting off no nose to spite its face? It has never known how to get the best out of its employees.

NIMROD UPSTAIRS AND DOWNSTAIRS

MAD BAD AND DANGEROUS TO KNOW ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN?

Rex Cramphorn

MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS TO KNOW by Rex Bell
 Music: Upstairs: Chamber: Richard Whiteman
 Bass: Byrne JOHN BELL

ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN? by Eric
 Clapton: Solo: Eric Clapton: Bass: Pat Travers: Rhythm: Eddie
 Green: Drums: Mervyn Barlow: LEA MARNO
 GUITAR: DAVID GILDED

Nimrod is currently making a caustic but two-faced attack on the conventional material when construed as an evening in the theatrical trial transcript. *Doubtless, Letters, Letters and Interaction of Incompetent Characters*, however. This is not intended as a coherent review of either production, but rather as a series of thoughts and questions relating to what they have in common.

Of course, the court-room drama and the one-man show have been with us for some time, but rarely with such association and at such an effort that the spectators' almost unquestioned dependence on the intent of the material. For both *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?* and *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* drew their material from real life and events present; the people who lived it without much in the way of translation into what we know as dramatic form — an area which they're characterized loosely as documentary rather than fictional. In the former we are shown a range of real people reacting to a challenging situation; in the latter we are shown a single vivid reaction to life in general. In both cases these actual human beings are presented for consideration as art.

Without ability or desire to pursue that links sartorial or aesthetic theory, I'd just like to note practical consequences. The Eric Bentley arrangement from records of the House Un-American Activities Committee has the advantage of a court room situation, which is generally conceded to be dramatic. In Ken Horne's production eight actors play some twenty-five real people (attorneys, investigators, committee members and the show-business victims of the investigation). Now Mr. Bentley has chosen a nice range of people and reactions to the committee's demands together with some linking material

in the form of a tape over. Ken Horne has characterized the voice over as a cheerleader and equipped her with a large scorecard which provides a neat visual representation of such terms as 'to block-list' or 'to white-wash'. It is in the area of the propriety of these eight actors representing those twenty-five real people in that theatrical situation that my anxiety about *Are You Now*

developed. First of all, is what extent is the actor playing the real person? If Drew Forsythe stalks on his presentation of someone's avowance because he has studied tape recordings of the trial and counted the words? When I asked Ken Horner he explained that most interpretations came from the material itself as well as from research. As where does it sleep? Is this the suit he is wearing copied from photographs? Has he made up to look like that person? For the actors do wear '60s-style suits, the microphones in front of them do look like the real '60s article and the space has a vaguely court-like feel although the cheerleader (Patti Bishop in semi-white and matching girl material) keeps the whole thing in a non-nostalgic context. The fact that Drew Forsythe is also playing three other real people complicates the problem but does not change it — even if these were an actor for each real person the question of degree of realism would remain.

So far it is only an artistic question when you're trying to represent how far should you go in the direction of impersonation? In theory the only response would be that it's a case for detailed mimicry, far beyond a rough stab at costume and voice, or nothing at all. But nothing at all would mean not even an American accent, and we're far too familiar with the variety of American voices to accept material with American reticence in

Australian voices. And that question converts into a wider frame of reference: How do we do an American play in Australia? Perhaps we can accept that an adapted Australian version of an American 'vigor' is a theatrical issue, a conventional representation that alludes to something without reproducing it.

To leave this impersonation question for a moment, there is also a moral one. No one can doubt that what the real slaves — generalized because of a political opinion — makes a tragedy of democratic ideals, the anguish of the victims of the immigration forced to choose between the official voice oligarchy and their own understanding of it springs clearly from the material. They were trapped in a situation in which they couldn't win — appearing either as communal sympathizers or stoolie-pigeons and either way intimidated and ruined. But what is our position as an audience now? We admire those who stuck it out, revolting like Patti Adolescent diggily, and deplore those who gave in and betrayed their friends, whether from motives of self-interest or genuine conviction that it was the right thing to do. We tick off goodies and baddies on the scoreboard of a change in historical perspective. Yet there are real people more of them still alive. Formed then the pile has family, the overlay of a second generation with hurt — who among these real people corresponds who badly? when in fact the situation itself is the evil. I'm not suggesting that this last point is not discernible in *Are You Now* — but simply that the other, fully keeping one stuck me more forcibly. The shaping towards this message in Eric Bentley's selection, but I think the choice to realize the comic keeper and move the production in the direction of impersonation does compound the problem.

John Bell as Byrne. Photo by Peter Haldeman





Barry Otto, Martin Harris, Alan Fletcher and Robert Davis in Are You Now or Have You Ever Been? Photographer: Mike Giddens

Are I saying then that the production would have been better morally or artistically without character voices without garbed clothes? without mad and interesting performances like, for example, Robert Davis's Abe Burrows? Certainly a part of the evening's interest seems to lie in the abilities of the actors to give individual inflections and qualities to each of the people they represent. And certainly it is a function for the director to insist on conferring the audience's attention to the material itself, at the expense of the theatricalization which can give it the very shape and accessibility that it may need. But how would this mad Abe Burrows feel if he were in the audience? In a detailed situation, the Father in *Practicing Six Characters in Search of An Author* says:

...however much of his art this confrontation puts into starting me into himself... however much he wants it even if he makes himself up to look as much like me as he can... it will be difficult for it to be a performance of me as I really am. It will rather be having made the operation his appearance... it will be how he interprets what I am... how he sees me.

He sees me as anything at all. And not just does it drag down within myself feel myself to be. And it certainly seems to me that whenever a callous upon no consideration at all will have to take this into account.

Given an actor of however and whatever no himself upstairs, Byron has little to feel better served. And whereas Eric Bentley's selection is fixed with redistributive zeal and the

desire to impose an inflexible coding, this blustery & vacuous and persuasive selection from Brynn's prove seems designed to increase the man and give him a chance to speak directly on his own behalf in a way that was never permitted him in his own lifetime.

To apply the same qualities Uniquely an Downstair's boy to Abe John Bell and his Director Richard Wherrett gone towards impersonation? I think to avoid their kind-apparitions, these clothes with expressions are all based on research. And although without the ready-made situation of a recorded trial, the material has been chosen so that Brynn speaks directly to us to accept an one or two slightly jolting surprises when he witness the presence of persons invisible to us and speaks to them rather as if he had been called upon to give evidence of himself to geometry. This combination of writer, actor and director together with the more self-negating nature of the material enable Brynn to render this apparent in a most sympathetic and convincing light. Perhaps then, the pragmatism of impersonation depends in some instant on degree, causality and occasion — it was good to meet the man in that relation.

But I was not uninterested in the mechanics of impersonation. I found myself thinking almost as much about Ben Blair and John Bell as I did about Baron. What sort of emotional identification had enabled the former to make such a personal seeming apology for Brynn? And how did the latter feel about absorbing into himself such an alien being? Where again does the impersonation stop? At Brynn's dressing gown, the chair, his carpet, his room? If Mylette if the set designed by Kruszak

freed from had really/couldly represented his room it would have been easier to accept his packing a trunk in it. But this was a room in which a large sheet of material briefly achieved elemental status at abstract purity. Blanks and water — clearly not a room-in-theatre. Come Below. My feeling is that of John Bell can conveniently impersonate Brynn, he would be best placed in a space which can achieve the same level of realism or a neutral space which makes no attempt at all to contribute to the impersonation. Perhaps I'm being wholly simplistic. Perhaps we accept that John Bell is something like Brynn's room that John Bell is something like Brynn and that the spaces in New Macbeth are something like America — symbols as a word, not real.

And as I said of *Are You Now... what is the alternative?* Am I saying that in the interest of some kind of intellectual fidelity this evening would be better without impersonation? Would John Bell be in his own person quaking these salacious? Does Brynn, replicating my theorization and simple focussing our attention on the material make a better evening in the theatre? Most people, I think would answer 'No'. I am, however, that the result would be something like a lecture and out of place in a theatre. Personally I'm not sure. I'd like to see such an evening — it would require great faith in the importance of the material and the open-mindedness of the audience. Surely in notions of the scope and function of theatre should be expansive enough to tolerate such a use of the medium? Or is there an insidious minimum of material culture beyond which it is not lawful for our documentary aspirations to take us?

it absent in so-called decadent art as the Cycle Sluts might claim to practice. Then it is merely trying to flout the norms of the day as much as the great décadence might have done.

The difference is that today, it is harder to mount a scandal. John Whiting's *The Gluttonous King of Siam*, seems to have appealed to a certain audience, he makes blinks of his nearly stone boyfriends eating dog shit on canapes.

When pleasure is combined with greed and villainy, the result is consequences worse and no pleasure seems moderation in morally thin decadence is the result. The killings reported by Truman Capote in *In Cold Blood* were committed by brutal stupid men but those described by Evelyn Williams in *Beyond Belief* — the Moon madams — have a sexual component of indecency, lasciviousness which however have only been associated in literature anyway with the decadent. Return details of uniquely In cases like these the hovel of one man's pain beats another man's lust.

In a discussion I had recently, The Moon's *Sex* play was cited as an example of a work of art which dealt with decadence. This is of course not true. However, there are aspects of the play which touch on decadent behaviour. The very baseness of the bourgeoisie seeing a play performed by madmen as an entertainment is a heartless one and the speech where De Sade recalls Casanova witnessing an execution with his hand in a woman's dress is also portraiture of decadent behaviour.

How has decadence been treated in art or more particularly in poetry, prose and on stage? The aesthetes have had the best of it. Petrusius created the foul breath of Naxos's Rome and Jovanni's invective still carry their weight. But those men along with Voltaire Pope and whoever else you care to mention,

were moralists. What about those who were content to dissolve, or at least hint at sordid penetrations? It is curious how harsh time has been on such studies. Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* is rather a futile study and *Salomé*'s Salomé is generally conceded an interesting figure in spite of the lassitude it inspired at the time. And if Gorion Gray went into the performed sex business after reading A. Robeson, who can read Huxley's novel today without being struck by a very different kind of affluvia.

Decadence is not an easy thing to evoke on stage. Recently we've seen Lindsay Kemp's *Hogarth*, rather hot house variety. The Jacobins did somewhat better and made the switch of decay their own special skill. It comes belching out of *Tourneur* and Webster as tangibly as a hard steamed from a corpse. Lacan's violence analysis are all interpenetrative in the play of these two and to a lesser extent in *Fried* when the voltage is lower!

The modern stand on decadence can be found stated in Atticus' *Xenakis* and *It's Good*. On the level of performance the theatre of cruelty has nothing to do with that sort of cruelty which we can use against each other sawing each other apart or tearing each other limb from limb. The sort of cruelty I'm talking about is much more terrible, cruelty which things can bring to bear upon us because we are not free. The heavens may indeed one day dive in on us and the theatre is there to show us that.

"The world commands to determine. Give up. This is the first commandment of the Cycle Sluts. They don't attempt to show us how which is why it's a bad theatre, no do they attempt to say it in an even faintly amusing fashion which is why they are not being performed by even the most vacuous thrill seekers."

The Cycle Sluts



ERIC DARE

CYCLE SLUTS

Ron Blair

CYCLES SLUTS is the New Arts Theatre, Glebe
Box: MORNING 9.30PM WEDNESDAY-NEXT COAST FURY
JEAN BENOIT, GORDON PARK, LISA EDEN, RICHARD
WILSON, ROBERT COOPER, CLAUDIO ALBERGO, ALLISON
POSSUM, PATRICK CRAVEN

Cycle Sluts is the current drag entertainment at the New Arts Theatre, Glebe playing. This fully integrated review (which features ten female chorus dressed in chrome and leather latex underwear who seem to have been chosen in their ability to be utterly revolting and completely repulsive) finds the only treasure is that the show which might have made an amazing five minutes in a drag revue club doesn't work in a theatre where the thin gaps are whinged and driven for ninety minutes.

For all the militant delivery of the Master of Ceremonies and his cast a chilling and laudable dawning the routines are simply not good enough to hold an audience for long. What does one say about an evening where the wittiest line is "Let not the sands of time get into your blouse?"

The self-styled "principle of silence and remark" has a simple gospel. "The world continues to deteriorate. Give up. In lieu of giving up, it would seem to recommend sodomy as an attractive way to pass the time. Perhaps sodomy is their only decent conclusion."

Somerset Maugham, who made human deterioration his own special study (and in his last years that nothing could shock him any more) killed himself. I would argue crudely that an essential ingredient in decadence and where it

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**HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE
COMPANY**

EQUUS

Bruce Knappett

Directed by Peter Shaffer. Scenery, Terence Clarke. Costumes, John Wrenford. Music, Steven Micallef. Sound, Alan James. Stage Manager, Michael Rundt. Stage Designers, Tony Doherty, Michael Rundt. Set Painters, Michael Rundt, Tony Doherty. Stagehands, Michael Rundt, Tony Doherty. Stage Managers, Michael Rundt, Tony Doherty. Assistant Stage Manager, Michael Rundt. Stage Manager, Michael Rundt. Stage Manager, Michael Rundt. Stage Manager, Michael Rundt.

The Hunter Valley Theatre Company's slow burn fell predictably old, and the time has come no longer to talk about it in those terms. Even so, Marks a masterly agent of the odds that does credit to director Terence Clarke.

For the most part the producer's weaknesses are externally imposed: the picture itself, for instance (the C.A.E.'s British Drama) is obvious and unconvincing; why do human beings build houses? What's each monument's instruction to the single communicative representativity of artful and financial resources. These continue to drive Clarke's choices to present the play staged by its spectators. Like us there on an educational institution's platform it was difficult for actors to isolate the one very tactic of lecture. Given the distance preceding at the close of the play perhaps that's not altogether inappropriate, but surely the audience could have argued about being there into oblivion. It was interesting to note the number of people during intermission who said they were having difficulty hearing.

They were resorting to the space rather than considering performances. I suspect John Doherty's original setting for the play is as used for the Old Tote production; inevitably drives spectators into the unfolding of remembered and repeated action so they more easily can share the questions posed by the running commentary. Up there, staging as here, had the effect of demanding people follow thought processes from one witness demonstration — something like a slide lecture.

And yet, although the play's morality was perforce played down (the actors who sat on the perimeter of the stage were and who in an area set aside before spectators awaiting cues to other directions, were denied any real theatrical function) I found that *Equus* reached more deeply of character than the Old Tote's production last year. It was performed with a sense of concern which the latter denied desperation. It was rarely if ever (and still is) how the earlier production struck me I feel.

Tony Doherty (left) and Michael Rundt (Doherty) in H.V.T.C.'s *Equus*.



Tony Doherty (left) and Michael Rundt (Doherty) in H.V.T.C.'s *Equus*.

Emory Cole feels a remarkable box office success in a number of countries over the past few years — not least in Australia where every State company has done it some offering a return season by popular demand. The popularity of the story of the strong boy who gets off easily by night, who easily gouges out the eyes of two horses, stems from an ingenuous and well wrought combining of themes and techniques. We have it now, in TV Doctor, the best I've seen! (Please Martin! It is vital, "You're the boy I only chance") justified both because of and despite his soft human heart. We have the school of government, the kindly one under threat. We have sex and religion — sometimes just as a substrate for the lack of the other, sometimes both driving, in The anything Society, to extremes.

The doctor, Doherty's commanding main principle, setting and structuring for the play. Rather than progress through conventional narrative, dialogue moves simultaneously back and forward. It advances by piecing together the past. Under Doherty's hand action is reaction no emotion response and comment. That is a story which might otherwise merely stamp us with sentiment and horror without being any the less exciting. Distanced re-action moves to recall certain characters and associations as others regard them thus in their own right past and present are periodically jolted, broken by Doherty's propulsive report and his own intense searching.

Clarke has taken no risks with his production, for what was necessarily lost by the remote staging he sought to substitute — the production could contribute to a more appropriate space with virtually no adjustments. That may be a criticism but I do not offer it as such.



Tony Sheldon (left) and Linda Rapson. Co-
Stars in H VTC's Equus.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY

OTHERWISE ENGAGED

Guthrie Worby

OTHERWISE ENGAGED by Simon Heath. At the Adelaide Festival Centre through 17 May. The cast includes Simon Heath, Trevor McDonald, John Doherty, Garry Sweeney, Stephen Hatch, John Clark, Jeff DeMets, John Pasley, Dennis Anne Peirce, Neil O'Donnell, Eileen Bain, Barbara Gaffin.

The horses with their�ekable and wild lighting changes, easily suggestive of both the domestic and the wild. Perhaps they did not work with full magic — when they intruded on the made scene they might not have evoked wild and terrible gods. Yet the naked mares looked on that stage as small, frail and cold that String's creation of delicate shine, still made significant sense.

All was in effect a little more hollow, a little more monochrome, and so the mind had to follow more alertly. What may have been lost in bravura was made up in atmosphere.

Part of my response was, I recognise, a reaction against dissatisfaction with Lester's Old Tote production. I felt that with an impulsion of display rather than substance Clark's production largely righted that balance.

The most significant actor here was Michael Radis's Dysart. This dancer with Dysart is perhaps that he appears not only the fittest guy in the world but also the most sensitive. He talks a lot — to us, to himself. In his stage follows. The role of callous, delictive expert involves generalised deporte gesture, and here Radis's earlier performance I found him moved to an increasing degree.

Radis's Dysart was never soleled down at heel; a civilian tail from where I was sitting, but I suspect he hadn't cleaned his shoes. His knees often came out with more than that organised and modulated polish. Hands were often in such positions — and when one hand generalised to make a mark a point it seemed as if his shoulder shrugged a little apologetically with it. He was often both confused and curious when he entered on the area which served as his consulting room but now doubled as the String household his eyes directed round to take it in whilst his body physical studied

1975. It would seem we're not quite as bad as the young Sterling! If Simon Heath's Otherwise Engaged really was England's best new play of the year then the British must also have fallen out of the cultural stock market — flat lack of resources. In a sense the play says as much. It says it covertly through scrounges of a group of the middle class educated who owl and scratch at see another and celebrate an perhaps inevitable Pravdichovka. They can't leave each other alone.

All the characters except one are in the words business publishing, education, literary criticism and critique. All of them except Simon Heath are basically engaged in life's Petty pursuits. Henry otherwise engaged his thesis. He wants to be quiet and alone with Wagner's Parsifal' to be rid of the sort of communissian from which he suffers.

The interest which the play generates rests largely on the ways in which Heath endeavours to avoid communicating. His friends and family will not let him be, and his 'boy' skill at laying traps to do so that he can sit down on his own is tested and tested by the boyish pack who hunt him in his off something more important, but less finite.

This run him to earth in a living-room-like at-home. Henry's life suggests when he is young. For an opportunity for social immaturity for an amorous love. Thereafter he is flagrantly delito with Period. Each time the spring bears with over him he is interrupted. His intelligence is beaten up and his wife begins their histrionics dodging and backtracking over familiar ground in order to protect and preserve his disengagement and also to defend these people from their own internal blunders. Worst are his desire and his open

difference.

Hob goodid him at appropriate times — the devised and efficient bedside manner, and never doubted as knew his stuff — but always it assumed a cover over a dubious intimacy. Through Hob's play is joint search for some external meaning sufficient to absorb passionately, and for an internal sense of responsibility sufficient to guide actions and choices was most effectively communicated.

As String, Tony Sheldon came closer to suggesting something profound boasting his role than he'd ever done in *Floating World* the brother-in-Glass Menagerie — two earlier H VTC productions. Yet it was sometimes fractionally difficult to recall that the boy was forcing Dysart to confirm the latter's second-hand soul. The elaborate silence was more gaudy than trauma-induced. His jingles were a smart side attack more than a defense.

There were aggressive flashes — sometimes it seemed you this boy has perched — yet when he descended it was with regulation of aplasia rather than a consuming fire. Sheldon is perhaps too brittle as actor for it that there must surely be very few capable of playing.

No less of also deserving of mention is to round off — but Robert Alexander must be mentioned. His performance as String's father had the same arresting quality I have described in Radis's Dysart. As father through the issue of sex, and when Sheller goes him an individual wife, Alexander managed to blend unprepossessing with dignified enterprise. It was a performance to justify a whole play being written around his character, yet also it was no hindsight. Alexander has shown himself an excellent company actor with the H VTC in a range of imaginatively handled parts.



George Sweeney (Doris) and Edwin Hodgman (Simon Heath) in S.A.T.C.'s Otherwise Engaged.

The center-stage motif is clear: military men risk equating his solitude to invulnerability in order to keep some of it for himself — but at what cost? As a metaphor in reason for middle-class educated effete Britain of 1975, it is doubtless apt. But are the characters important enough to warrant an undivided attention for two hours with a twenty-minute interval? The answer is in the playing and in the placing the answer was somewhat equivocal.

Simon Heath was most worthy of attention when Edwin Hodgman showed him to be a victim of his intelligence. This occurred particularly in the sequence with Hob — who is neither friend nor family to Henry — but becomes something more intimate than either a kind of frenzied convenience. For the first time, a strong sense of performer interplay allowed the character-depth and ambiguity

Doris Oberon's skilful Maud of apparent calm curiosity and secret sexual jealousy, reversed only by Francis Hedges' which incessantly twisted and pulled at an empty shiny glass, made Woods's version a genuine challenge to a considered and inherently unsatisfactory Hinch.

A similar sense of moment to moment human engagement was achieved between Diane Chamberlain and Mr Hodgeman in the perniciously mismatched pairings of the play in which Hinch outshines himself overburdened with communication and semi-inexperienced pregnant. Here again Mr Hodgeman's chosen person, coolly private and self-possessed, was thwarted at first by the warmth of a convincing partner.

The production also sparkled in the closing moments Hinch haunted by a screwed-up memory of Woods's recorded helpline message as it interrogates his desire to suicide — a response for Hinch a schoolboy infatuation with and respect for his teacher — and during Golding's accusations of disloyalty throws his weight in the Clinic's face: "What sort of a man do you think I am?" he demands. Golding's response is doubtless significant. Christ, he exploded, as this wholly incomprehensible binds him. It is deadly if analysis can't stop.

With Hinch a frazzled yet determined and witty words: "Toss you more than I can say. Thank you... To just they set themselves to listen to Wagner, Golding a lyrical but somewhat bedraggled rock sparrow as played by John Russey, occupies Hinch's chair. Hinch sits immobile in figure and features wedged into the corner of the same stage center arms behind his head no longer guardedly crossed, an icon of separation of solitude without solace. Don't throw me out eh! I've got nowhere to go and I don't think like going there yet," says Golding — a quiet and funny line. But Hinch has a greater problem. He is in his place, transfixed, yet he belongs there now, even less than Golding has, still held by the music, forced to tolerate this atmosphere immobilized and strained by the knowledge of his wife's pregnancy for which he is doubtless though doubtfully responsible.

In other encounters however, the cast and

director Leslie Dayman were hard pressed to cover two-dimensional material. The play lists its weaknesses, contrivances and jokes.

The garrulous here-beheaded became only in the place at which Golding's gaunt Doris the blarney dame rep' takes her short sit after Golding has thrown whisky over her, is impossible to avoid and hard to believe. Anne Radzin single off and handles and the culture's batch role with fortitude.

George Stavrov as Gove the pit-student sets in motion the chain action of attempted payment #6 he first hands in on Hinch his treasured whistle to the tune of *Parsifal* is jolting and transfers, and gives forewarning of things to come. But by this time Davis has confronted Hinch in a posture of cogitated violence the character is bereft of substance a game for a couple of the prey's remaining flies.

Stephen Hinch, the school teacher professionally comes close to conviction in that production. John Dick finds the man behind the mountings most convincingly in the blow-as-cool-down sequence in which Stephen invites an getting back of his brother by telling about Beth's infidelity.

In addition there are unconvincing partnerships for which performers designer and director must take equal responsibility. These reveal a veneer of intimacy which often emerges when Australian actors are being "typically middle class English". They exhibit a trifle too much vocal and physical entitlement to ring believability true.

In this case the decorative element was styled by Simon Gurnon, laminated and dressed wood set. The living room of Simon Hinch's house in Wellington was something but lived in. Spaces impeccably arranged and specific it was simply a pleasureless sculptured space through and about which the actors moved. In no sense was it Simon's place, his refuge. Consequently he was often too easily dispossessed of it by the succession of individuals who stalked, talked and sat about the set with garrulous ease. Thus despite Mr Hodgeman's attempts to justify Hinch's claim

to possession through admissions of the character's obnoxious preoccupations will-order.

A further complication in the quasi-audience relationship issue was the decision to perform the play in the multi-functional Space rather than in the Playhouse where it belonged. The result was a presentation lost without the arch which distanced the allegedly seated audience from the performers in a way that ultimately disadvantaged both groups.

The up-side of the play are its most pleasing and questionable feature. They revolve around Public Schoolboys, Cambridge shabbily, mid-Xenophobe (particularly with reference to Australians) and a pseudopatriot with moustaches. They are presumably the pleasures of such soldier sons.

Intelligent and articulate as they are, the men are in some way ingenuous or juvenile. Werner Blasberg alias Woods the Woodie, "plop" (not) with his masturbating marriage-manager the raconteur, Golding with his impulsive predilections and anal retentive tendencies, Davis with his penchant for the express fuck. Shulman can pass as an ordinary and considerate old fellow while with his five children in urgent to prove that he is not a "stout patriarch" and even Sutton with his gendered and flip justifications for an assay of causal language and no children are all sexily immature.

The women Davis and Beth abandon them to their indiscretions. They see clearly that they can't expect to be honour deserted or deceived, and leave them — two before than, thus fault listening to a recording of an operatic Howl a woe and holy fool.

The strength of the play lies in its intelligent humours and precise use of language. The value of the production lay in the fact that the S.A.T.C. has access of the talents of Mervyn Hodgeman and Oberon and a director in Leslie Dayman who invariably capitalises on the play's strengths. However, the policy of showing the best from overseas must be called into question when the best is apparently otherwise employed.

Julie Purdy (left), Edwin Hodgeman (Simon) and Anne Radzin (Doris) in S.A.T.C.'s *Otherwise Engaged*



NEW OPERA SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NEVER THE TWAIN IGNORANCE IS BLISS? FESTINO

Peter Ward



Daphne Harris, Patsy Herdman-Hayes and Norma Knight in Festino

NEVER THE TWAIN Text by Bertolt Brecht and Rudolf Klopstock. Composed by John Gilbert. Music by Willi Ekdahl. Directed by Bertolt Brecht. Stage set by Bertolt Brecht. Costumes by Bertolt Brecht. Properties, Adelinde Brink. Set Design, Peter Cherry. Accompaniment, David Bang. Cast: ROBIN LEADER, GARY BRENNAN, JOHN SWINNELL, ROBIN BRADLEY.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS BY Hermann Hesse. Directed by James McDonald. Music by David Dugdale. Accompaniment, David McDonald. Set Design, James Cooper and Evelyn Jones. Costumes, Evelyn Jones. Properties, David Cooper. Stage Management, Alan MORNA KNIGHT. Boxes, DAVID BRENNAN. Stage Manager, Alan MORNA KNIGHT.

FESTINO — Scenario, Hermann Hesse; Director, Clark Woods. Costumes, David Cooper. Stage Manager, Alan MORNA KNIGHT. Boxes, DAVID BRENNAN. Horns, GORDON BROOKS. Drums, GORDON BARRETT. Cast, HERMANN HESSE, ALAN MORNA KNIGHT. Boxes, DAVID BRENNAN. Stage Manager, Alan MORNA KNIGHT.

New Opera South Australia is a surprising company. Firstly because it runs well since it cannot do so without Government support, and the conventional western-style repertoire has tended at least in South Australia always to argue that opera is at best expensive and at worst diversionary extravagance. But there you are. Here it is. Here were old, supposedly the State and Federal Governments, and its sponsors in the community and very highly regarded.

Secondly it is surprising because its achievements are noteworthy and regular. It has of course had some spectacular successes — the 1974 Festival offerings were both eminently negotiable, even though Shostak's *Fairy Tales* was in its vulgarity and banalities far more acceptable than the undergraduate nonsense presented at The Commerable Regis of King Charles IV (see Daphne's *Loudly Tunes*). However in that short season in the Festival Concerts Programme indicated that it had recovered from such bouts of gastritis.

There were three works in two programmes. The first was *Never the Twain* which is a kind of these pieces that sets out to illustrate how Rudolf Klopstock's series of his maxims, and a little of his style, influenced Bertolt Brecht in the development of some of his theories. The text is composed by John Gilbert, a Brecht scholar and dramatist, and the structure is basically a series of alternate song recitations by a cast of four, three men and a woman, who also will act various

appropriate or peripheral characters.

It is illuminating material, with the caustic readings from for instance "The Ballad of East and West" (Klopstock) the "Ballad of The God and the Soldier" (Brecht), through to "Saturnine Johnson" (Brecht), "Hippocrate Weil", "Mandorley" (Klopstock), "The Song of Mandorley" (Brecht/Hippocrate Weil), and wealth, I you know it, "The Recessional" (Klopstock-Dugdale). There were 24 items in all.

But having noted that, and having been intrigued by the superficial paradox of an angelic old influence in an anti-representative one, should also see that apart from the literary interest and ergonomics that I appreciated at least, one would rather have one's Brecht in an undiluted form, especially unaided by the baggage of Klopstock. The point is that Klopstock is a nice old poet, and Brecht is a green old poet, and they don't perfectly mesh.

The production was directed by Willi Ekdahl in his every manner of fact, why a sparsely decorated stage, each prop having some point to make or job to do, and a performance that in its generality was direct, intuitive, and intellectualised. And long live the intellect! If the cast can keep up with it.

Unfortunately they could not. What was needed was effective experience of Charly's methods, together with a capacity to handle with intelligence, humour, irony, brio. Boban Archer achieved it, as a result, a camp follower, and simply as a first-class performer. She should be measured by the company and be regarded as an essential (Willi Ekdahl) creative gift to Australian theatre.

John Geddes, David Brendan and Howard Spicer, by contrast, couldn't maintain the requisite dash. Geddes lacked robustness, Spencer and Spicer even brio, and so Charly and Archer stole the show, which is a proper way to describe the production. Further, the experience of the maximisation started one immediately. Charly's outstanding qualities as a director, now mature and assured and this wrong, it has been said! Adelaide has so consistently tended to ignore him. It has been Arden's loss, S.A.T.C. take note.

New Opera's second offering in the season will be two works of radically different temperament, both of which illustrate the growing technical strength of the company, but which tend to suggest that it does not yet

know what it really wants to do. (One notes, with a certain sinking feeling, that New Opera's next production is *La Bohème*. Who, for God's sake, is up to the first sign of decadence of decadence?)

(*Ignorance is Bliss* is a small piece by Gottfried Chébler mainly concerned with Robert's (Hermann Hesse) ignorance about what to do with, or to, or about, his new wife, Helene. Robert's tutor, John Wood, is consulted, but he too is blustery and exuberantly ignorant. G. Freud! The problem is solved when a storm breaks and the couple are, as to speak, thrown together.

It is a slight work, a kind of operatic divertissement, and Justin McDowell's direction gave the feel of off-the-wall style if required and deserved. There was a very elegant decoration set by James Geddes and Evelyn Jones — a kind of white bird cage set out with nonchalant, lavish furniture — and the costuming of this late 19th Century work was, wealth, I you know it, impeccable. In short, in general and as to style, it was an encyclopaedic conception.

There was more substance in the second work, *Festino*. This is a collage of maxims by Andronicus Anthonius, who was a first 16th century Tuscan poet, orator, composer and musical theorist. The maxims are delightfully translated by Murray Coopland, and then were presented with enthusiasm, love and good humour in a kind of garden of gastronomic delights, it being a garden of mushrooms. It is hard to brief this production on one instantaneous plane: it was a good show which the audience enjoyed. It was dressed with great fluency and dash and it Axel Bentz's mushrooms did not blow one's mind; they allowed for high spirits and good humour with an occasional touch of delicious gallantry and passion.

Finally, one has to ask, was it all worth it? Probably yes. Each production indicated a capacity for style and nuance that made thethen Australian opera lack luster because it is so often in search of a 19th century and irrelevant drama. Previous days are ahead for New Opera if it can reject the glamour of the Grand Opéra in its own right discover that their drama is not necessarily museum theatre.



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With kind permission from Fabiano Pregnolli Blythe, my colleague, Gisela

Keywords: *an* *participle*, *aref*, *di*, *in*, *light*, *on*, *participle*

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Further reading: Mrs Thomas 2000, pp. 43-4.

Playscript I

Jennifer Rankin's

Dees

Theatre Australia presents *Dees*, a play by Jennifer Rankin. The last act of *Dees* is published in this issue of the magazine and the second and last act will appear in the September-October issue.

The Stables production of *Dees* met with strong critical response which ranged from the outright hostile to the enthusiastic; yet the very amount of critical smoke the play provoked shows that as a piece of theatre it did not lack provocative force. Critics were particularly aggressive about the characterisation which they thought was simply sexist stereotyping, partly perhaps because of the 47 000 grant from the National Advisory Committee of International Women's Year for the production (for example Romano Consalvo).

The subject matter of *Dees* is not entirely surprising considering that the production has been sponsored by the Advisory Committee of Women's International Year.

The two men in her life are her husband, a male chauvinist pig and a male called Brook, another male chauvinist pig in disguise.

And few were sensitive to the play's subtle symbolism. Vick Wright was one of the few.

Although the tightly packed audience found many opportunities to burst out laughing, the play is a pretty serious matter, a study in non-verbal communication.

Or perhaps, between the lines, communication would be more apt. It is a strange play which fluctuates between true life and surrealism as though there were a system of shifting lenses between the watchers and the seen.

Jennifer Rankin has written a play which lingers in the mind.

Many people objected to Kate leaving her husband Max dying but as Jennifer Rankin points out there is sympathy for Max at the end but little for Kate for when to remain with her husband in their unit would be spiritual death. There was little affective distinction made by critics between the production and the play itself (whether or not) were not described to either particularly.



Jennifer Rankin is a poet and dramatist, born in Sydney in 1941. Jennifer graduated in Arts from Sydney University in 1962 after which she worked a variety of jobs including working for the Australian Journalists Association.

Over the past three years, Jennifer's poetry has been published in *Age*, *New Poetry* and *Poetry Australia*, and has been broadcast on ABC radio's "Poetry Now". *Ridolf Shirts*, her first book of poetry was recently published by Malar Poets, Queensland as part of their Gargoyles Series.

Dees was written in 1974 and was workshoped for the Melbourne Theatre Company under the direction of Brian Hegeman. In the same year the Theatre in Education Company of the Melbourne Theatre Company produced her play *Dees*. *The Diving Bell Dance* was produced by the Melbourne's ABC Radio Education Department in 1975.

Kate was awarded a grant for a Sydney production at the Stables Theatre by the National Committee for International Women's Year and has been accepted for production by ABC Radio Drama's "Sound Stage" later this year.

perhaps a calmer and more balanced response will emerge from the publication of the two scripts in the heady atmosphere of theatrical performances.

Susan Hepburn told the playwright after the confusing storm broke:

"In a few years time it would be nice to do a season of women Australian plays which when first done were unintentionally done or misinterpreted. There would certainly be one of them!"

Dees is a funny yet serious play that becomes increasingly surreal.

I suppose it could be loosely described as a play about different perceptions of life. This is also a better description than the narrow view of *Dees* as a play concerned chiefly with sexual conflict, though there is that too.

Kate is married to a successful businessman and she also has a lover. Both husband and lover believe that Kate is unfulfilled and look chink they have the answers to what they see as her empty life. Kate however does not relate to life on the same level as the two men. Although seen by them as unfulfilled Kate is in fact very much involved with the physical universe with the patterns and shapes that occur and recoccur in her physical and emotional environment.

The kites are not only a symbol of Kate's flexibility but they also are a symbol of life itself. They have a Taoist quality. Tao, the ancient Chinese belief in the unbroken, everlasting rhythms and patterns of the physical universe - it being an expression of the divine breath (chi). Kite is concerned to see these patterns. She has compassion for the kite.

And of course it is the kites who show the way to the other woman. I like to see her as perhaps a part of Kate herself - the part of herself that she goes to meet - that she is in tune with when she is in the antithesis the valley to the natural world.

The kites are a symbol of the natural physical world and also they have for me personally an inner spiritual value, as in the Taoist Aesthetic spirituality. They free Kate. They lead her back across the metaphorical valley.

Jennifer Rankin



"Well! Taking up a career, or...? Having a baby? Being a wife?"

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The Sydney Opera House is magnificent. Its visual glories are manifold. The arrangement of form, mass and space and its relationship to its surroundings are at once an expression of aspiration and achievement. There is a restless yearning desire counterpointing serenity, dignity and confidence. Inspiring in its freedom, exulting in its abandon and celebration it reaches beyond itself and is wonderful. One is overwhelmed by its cyclopean mass only when standing on the concourse close to the lower walls. "When the Opera House demands, monomously, it gives", wrote Katherine Basford in 1973. It is "a backdrop for great ideas".

Few would disagree.

Whatever one's qualms may be about the design of either interior, both the Concert Hall and the Opera Theatre maintain the feelings of expectation and excitement aroused by the exterior. These are not diminished at one moves through the entrances and foyers to take one seat. Auditoria are spacious and generally relate to the soaring whole. One is conscious of being part of an audience, gathering in a great space, lifted but not disempowered by the surroundings. Each seat is an occasion. Generous glass hung foyers and promenades with breathtaking views of the harbour may with one and support the heightened mood. Under these halls of music, song and dance there is a dark bunker.



THE OPERA HOUSE AT SUNRISE

Theatre Buildings – I

THE DRAMA THEATRE

Raymond
Omodei

"You find it on the Quay side of the Opera House at the concourse level. The entrance is unobtrusive — a paved circular under-roofed recess of masonry, no metal casements here. Theoyer, though spacious, asserts his coquettish and opulent ways, with no concessions — excepting decent long hair — to romance. This is the bargain basement of the Opera House."

The auditorium preserves the original benches, "semicircular box" So it was described by H.G. Kipnes. He concluded

"In the box with my straight rows of straight-backed seats, one has the atmosphere of the university lecture room... there is lots of the intimacy which I hold to be essential in a playhouse — no seats from the straight lines of seats of an audience gathered around or near a stage and its curtains, nor much sense of the others in the audience. It would make a good circus there in the balconies, audience inter-relationships and audience-player affinities direct enough."

"A sense of stadiumism's influence permeated with the heavy and public circulation areas of the Concert Hall and Opern Theatre," says designer Ian Robins. "Before entering one is aware of the massive bulk and understructure of the major part of the building and the leading of enormous weight a carried through into the oppressively low and claustrophobic foyer and auditorium. Surely a foyer should encourage free movement and relaxation by spectators? It takes comparatively few people to turn the foyer into an uncomfortable crush. One has to fight one's way to the bar and cloakrooms and give a belligerent look to the auditorium door."

From the coldness and desuetude of the former era, I find with a curious feeling of discomposure into the equilibrium to be confounded by basic osmotic walls huddled under a menacing low ceiling with its metallic bands of oxidized lighting. No feeling of expansion. Warmth or wonder here where the only human focus is often the disquietingly close anonymous ligament in the eleemosynary booths.

Another focus may be the Criterion of the Mean if designer and director have come to terms with it and decided its use will not adversely affect their work. It is much avoided

I have always found this auditorium a fascinatingly oppressive experience — dark without mystery, close without intimacy, its right rows of white and vermilion seats enveloping and suffy formal. There are virtues. The seating is roomy and reasonably comfortable, sightlines are excellent and the acoustics provided are liaison in placing the seats allow for maximum audience participation. Everything can be seen and heard.

Since its opening in October 1973 the Drama Theatre has been occupied by Sydney's prestigious Old Tote Theatre Company. The company presents some twelve productions a year over two seasonal sites at the Drama Theatre and six at the Parade Theatre in Kensington.

"For many years, while it was being built, I used to think how marvellous it would be to work there at the Opera House," says Ann Fraser, Head of Design for the Old Tone. "When it finally happened it wasn't the recognition I'd hoped. One reason for this was the absence of theatricality. There was no feeling of theatre about the place. This was partly due to the understandable lack of tradition in the

new threats, but mainly it was the result of the public service cut factory feeling that was everywhere.

"Pell-mell tradition and atmosphere are not essential but one certainly misses them when they are not there. This is sad. Strangely enough the new Theatre Royal does have the feeling of theatre about it.

"There are physical problems flying facilities, especially downstage, are inadequate. A full fly out is impossible, unless one goes to the expense of tapping and breaking (padding) the pieces to be flown.

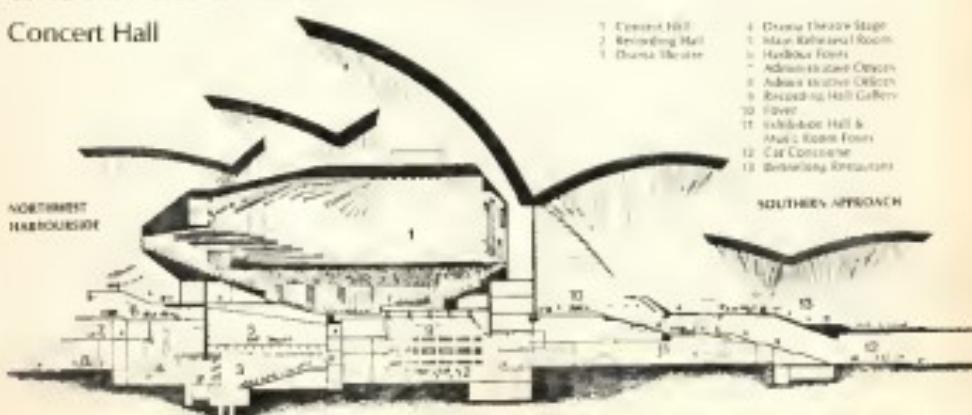
"To the poor living arrangements are the additional problems of inadequate work and storage space for storage. Because of this one is compelled to use the revolver as much as possible to effect some change. It's a matter of economics — one man can change the set by pressing a button whereas additional staff are required to work the filing system and that operating costs increase."

Of course the revolve system does have a variety of uses but there is a danger of working the device to death. There is a limit to the number of times it can be exercised.

"The proportions of the presented opening are not attractive. One can overcome the great width of the opening by creating a strong focal point in the design for example, the great tree in Jose's Labrador

"But the biggest problem is with the lighting. There are not enough lamps and the equipment there is not as versatile as it should be. For example, if one lights the orchestra one cannot adequately light the rest—particularly if working towards the full depth of the stage."

Concert Hall



7. **Clement Hill**
 8. **Brewster Hall**
 9. **Drama Theater**
 10. Drama Throne Stage
 11. Main Refectory Room
 12. Harkness Room
 13. Administration Offices
 14. Admin Faculty Offices
 15. **Brewster Hall Galleria**
 16. **Foyer**
 17. **Holdridge Hall 6**
 18. L. Robin Fournier
 19. Caf' Concierge
 20. **Brewster Restaurant**

The Drama Theatre — Raymond Omrod

The Senneca lighting with which the theatre is equipped is a constant source of anguish. It is expensive, unreliable and inadequate. Developed in Germany for continental traditions of stage design and direction, it has little to do with our own traditions, directions and development. I have myself set for long hours whilst lighting designer and techniques struggled with those vague poets of murky, strangely yellowish-foggy light longing for the flexibility and change directional qualities of the Strand equipment with which we have all grown up and which has grown with us.

"The German theatre lights from all four sides of the stage, all round the actor," segurisits Ian Fraser, the Old Tote's Stage Director. "Unconsciously the Drama Theatre is equipped only with enough lamps to light four and/or two sides. One could say that there is almost a Strand set up but it's isolated with Senneca materials."

Now are the facilities sufficiently related to one another. For instance if the forestage space is filled into with its impossible to light effectively. It can be lit from the front of course but stagehands/aside lighting is out of the question. Problems can be overcome by colour, but it is not a sensible thesis."

Whilst the stage is vast in area and width and liberally equipped with traps and the two gigantic containing revolutes and comprehensive flying systems, these elements do not effectively relate to each other. The stage area is handicapped by the hideous proportions of the proscenium arch. Katherine Brinsford sees this as a serious problem "with its apertures like a letter box." The top of the arch is proportionately very low (about 10 feet) from the back row and the mounting width creates the feeling of enclosure. The outer revolute of metal supports the rear wall and two structural propounding walls in the wings rendering the already meagre backstage storage space useless if the revolute is

employed. The revolver is noisy. The grid for the flying system is too low.

An audience once seated and involved has small if any idea of the equipment-existing and technical aspects with which productions are co-produced and for this reason the Drama Theatre will I know and hope continue to attract the public. It is part of the performing artist's mission to meet, even to greet challenges but where that challenge is concerned the problems facing artist and technician are not overcome by calling them insurmountable challenges. Here, generally they are restricting limitations of overwhelming ingenuity.

For its opening season at the Drama Theatre the Old Tote prepared three contrasting pieces, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the Brecht-Weill *Threepenny Opera* and Williamson's *Mirra of You Died Tomorrow?* The three markedly different productions between them explored and exploited the stage. Direction and design were consciously geared to make best use of its virtues and vice to serve the interpretation. It was in every way a memetic season. Success and failure were, for me, terms less applicable to individual productions than to elements, moments by moment within them.

An important legacy from the season is that for every production since the theatre has been approached with empathy, respect and by everyone involved. Growing familiarity has bred neither contempt nor a feeling of satiety.

The delights and disappointments of the first season have not been much exceeded either way. The works that have had least in the Drama Theatre have been those which by nature, physiognomy and performance have

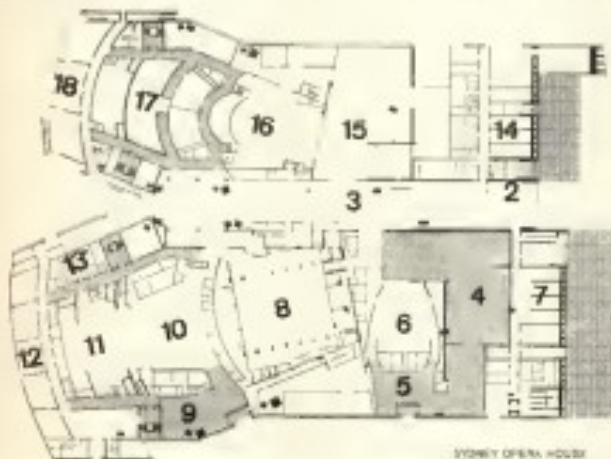
(Right) Auditorium of the Drama Theatre for the Old Tote's *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Below: General plan of Opera House showing Drama Theatre layout



DRAWING A — GROUNDFLOOR

12'0" x 12'

1. Car Compound
2. Stage-Door
3. Central Service Passage
4. Exhibition Hall
5. Cinema
6. Chamber Music Hall Foyer
7. Concert Stages
8. Ensemble Recording Hall
9. Drama Theatre Foyer
10. Drama Theatre
11. Drama Theatre Stage
12. Administrative Offices
13. Dressing Rooms
14. Drama Theatre
15. Staff Areas
16. Jet storage
17. Rehearsal Room
18. Streetwalk Restaurant



SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE STAGE 2
ARCHITECTS: HILL TODD & LITTLEMORE

A

been big and bold or lyrical/evenness — What's your Devil? Tomorrows? Love for Love, The Playboy of the Western World, Of Mice and Men, Peer Gynt and Mourning Becomes Electra. In many cases important elements in the plays were compromised by the design team to make the theatre work but, whenever possible one may have about production and interpretation, these presentations succeeded with audiences. They reached, interested, made demands, illuminated and excited. Each audience, and in some cases triumphed over the unsympathetic nature of the venue.

I have restricted comment to the physical nature of the building and its production elements. Actors' attitudes would be the subject of another article. My impression is that actors, like the rest of us, enjoy the comforts of the quite splendid greenroom and are relaxed by the knowledge that they can be born, seen and heard without strain or undue effort. Backstage facilities and conditions in this country are generally pretty appalling and here the Drama Theatre provides a welcome change with well appointed if somewhat poky dressing rooms.

The architecture of the theatre dominates. It defines itself visually and in so doing insists itself upon the performance experience. During my years with the Old Toko I was directly or indirectly concerned with the company's efforts to make the theatre work, to bend and break the massive concrete grip of the place. Marvelous thought and painstaking effort, constant rethinking, selecting and distilling, going back to scratch, occupied artists and technicians who approached each production with renewed impatience and determination, not only to realize the imagination of the play in question but also

the work from the elevating influences of the building.

These essentials exist that are not in harmony — the atmosphere of the whole theatre, the polar stage/auditorium relationship and finally the stage equipment itself which generally seems worst the most effective performance position, the area backstage centre.

Solutions have been found for certain problems but they are not durable for a wide range of interpretations of styles.

This theatre is utilitarian, almost anti-human and without humanity and spirit the drama cannot flourish.

"This is not home for a permanent company. Not, even when the teaching troubles are sorted, can I see that it can be," was H.G. Kippen's conclusion on the venue in a review of the first season in 1979.

It was fitting that the presence of the Old Toko, the state's principal drama company, should grace and be graced by the capital's celebrated temple for the performing arts. However, for the sake of its future and other artistic growth the company should find itself a more benign and flexible theatre.

All the best of the Drama Theatre's troubleshoots the damaging truth that in basic design concept it is absolute passiveness, arch theatre. Within this obsolescence even the felicities of the fourth wall are cancelled by a proscenium opening of abnormal width spreading across the darkness under a lowering ceiling. No amount of tuning up with colourful curtains, mechanical curtains and sectional lighting can successfully dispel the unvarying sense that in this edifice for the living arts, the drama has been relegated to a hole in the mountains. ■

Drama Theatre Specifications

STAGE

Total stage area	approx 3,800 sq. ft
Main stage area	approx 2,900 sq. ft
Revolving stage floor area	approx 1,800 sq. ft

PROSCENIUM OPENING

Height	road 16' 1"
Width (variable by means of portable screen)	from 36' to 48'*

SCENE HEIGHT

33 ft

Variables comprised of two concentric circles

Outer diameter 45' 6"

Inner dia. diameter 30' 0"

Revolve can be used together as one, or singly in the same or opposite directions at the same or different speeds.

Audience capacity 550

*After completion recently completed three stages of a revised Auditorium with the Old Toko and the ATYP deproscenium-right projection. Prior to completion there were 36' and 48' widths available. The 36' width is now available again. The 48' width is still available. The 30' inner diameter is now available again from the original width projection. ■



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Australian Currents

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROADSHOWS

Nigel Triffitt

BEST OF ANNUAL. After a disastrous tryout the *Yellowbrick Roadshow* has been given a second chance. It's now playing at the Arts Theatre, Melbourne, after opening at the Studio Theatre, Melbourne, and the Queen Victoria Building, Sydney. It's a show that should interest people with a particular fondness for *Forum* and *Man of La Mancha*, including members of the TAA, and others who like to follow the Yellow-Brick Road. Contributors for responses below:

As I write this, a team of mega bands is building a large and elaborate set. Two of the best available lighting men in Sydney are hanging and plugging our Chris Jacobs' sets, having started with the John Olsen prints specially commissioned for the play in the dressing room. I am the director, the designer and the administrator of the theatre putting on the play.

Three months ago I hung precariously on a tight rope of indecision—uncertainty with today's group of people, clinging desperately to the threads of a remembered experience and trying equity dispersively, so associate the incomplete, uncertain and experimental possibilities of two years of youth confronting associational brick wall. Above all well that we knew was coming a brick wall of politics and possibilities, polemics and polemics, polemics and a certain reticence.

Yellow Brick Roadshows covered exactly 25 months, covered over 100,000 Km of constant touring, played to around 80,000 people at all ages, engulfed the lives of the people involved and ultimately compromised and destroyed us at Sydney's Seminar Centre in May '76 (self-destructed because the green castle of hope at the end of the yellow brick road was one of our own making, and we ten out of eight money less, but more than money a reason for existing).

Our thesis was for the people, by the people, taken to the people of the people. Not polemic, nor mere amateur cultural critique, double talk but theatre that related to the future in the shape of future or tend to the future of choices (vain hope or calculated naivete). Gross, crude, vulgar, aggressive reality. Here it is: what does she? What's she change? Laugh at yourself? Think it out a bit more? Gross, but whence the solution? What's your answer?

Yellow Brick Roadshows was our answer! There was another way to live, another way to relate. Leave the base and the possessive base, strike a lot of deep love with her adventure, recklessness. Take Australia, in your stride, based on the country from the people, shock 'em, surprise 'em, make 'em think... get off the pedestal! And whatever people don't stop to think, live it let it grow with it do it fully.

Revolving words in the Whiteman era, the government was behind us so, the sellers were the people, the revolutionaries, not the professional deformations. Proof it could be done—and I suppose we did. We did actually durability/breakthroughs which ended off me looking back, and incidentally no running back. Given up the job and the causes took our sellers, where it came from ourselves, of \$25.00 a week for the first six months, \$40.00 a week and so on, the bookings came in at an average of \$75.00 a week for the last year. Pay your own food and accommodation and you were left with around \$25.00 clear, a writer of used megaphones and genuinely enthusiastic indifferences behind you.

This will hopefully become an commonplace, then we searched for even more extraordinary adventures—first it was the green flea of a tour to Tasmania (just days, sure, but that's the time). Four of the company were invited for concentration on a mid-octopush—we're still piecing all this down. Sessions in Melbourne, Canberra, Australia '75; Sydney, Geelong and Melbourne again. Victoria and New South Wales country areas followed before the next green flea. Accidental, but fair. A complete tour of Northern New South Wales was completed. A wave of outraged public opinion started and culminated by a genuine country style of constituency leaders anxious to spend their school or town town was picked up by the media and pleased. Part of the Roadshow, from McLeansbury to Armidale, bookings were cancelled suddenly and across left stranded outside towns. Theatres, Gaolhouse, department stores, bars followed. Police action threatened, and thousands of people talked over whether or not fifth and

sixth form pupils should be expected to the word shit be presented with plays about masturbation, teenage breakdown, incest and adultery of honour, a ballerina who pooped her pants. Theatres in Education parties were burned. Invaluable cultural standards protect the morals of the young. Make them live us.

The North Coast adventure made us political fighters, individuals and ourselves. Performance became a deliberate act of discrete audience assertion of the relatives (and/or) of the family, the job, the sexual and cultural morality. The culture motto that makes gauging the three in a ritual act of homage to some unchallengeable artificially disseminated notion that culture is good for you. Must culture is very boring.

Merely stating the problem is not enough, we had to provide some kind of solution, and the religion was us, people, a group that could live together, well and effectively, produce and perform, operate outside the known theoretical structures, anti-blue laws, disease. Take the audience to the cultural faultlines—state the truth, let them find their own way home. Privately the group was presented harassed, unhappy, lonely signs, poor and mostly scared. Publicly the bravest world was just around the corner.

So here we followed Gemini took up on. We got harassed there too. We played isolated in pub (semi-demolished houses), cyclone-razed humpies, to people. People unencumbered by a false notion of theory, unencumbered in fact by any notion of theory. Real people who shouted, yelled, talked out loud, didn't care the best audience in the world. Audiences who gave back gave back joined in that instant theatrical equation, actors, audience and interaction. No shit.

The single constant element of our on-stage theatre was the simplicity of this equation. Find an actor, go in an audience, illuminate a stage area, add a few light bulbs so that the audience could see the actors, add a red curtain so that actors had a chance to not be seen, play for pace, punch and energy, based primarily on emotion and therefore Sherman logic, and play fast, by and with the resultant interaction. Start with the basics and only add when necessary. Embellishment was planned rare-in-theater, staging and sequencing created confusion, lines of native democracies, deliberately demolished audience attention track decorated and caused choices flouted, steadily threatened—all to the single, unbreakable purpose of putting a group of people in sufficient state of being that they could respond honestly and in a giving way to a set of stimulus that was, in fact, themselves put through some sort of social thrashing machine.

"The Beastie Show on earth" of Jacqui Shatto, Andrew Anderson, Louise Sanders and Geoff Dan



Over the course of the twenty-five months the repertoire grew from a tight group of fifteen short plays (Shaw, Beckett, the likes of Eugene Ionesco), kept with a couple of original scripts, evolved from open theatrical oddities of my own to over 150 short pieces with a 75% original content written, rehearsed and refined through a constant process of performance restructuring to suit or define the demands of both the venue and type of audience — be they upper or lower secondary students, university audiences or general public. Gradually the earliest grew to be less important, once established, and became part and parcel to the next wave so beginnings and ends of pieces grew to be less defined. Structuring over and above the content was established. Space and time became dominant, culminating in one sequence of ten short plays introduced as 'The fastest show on earth' fifteen plays in thirty minutes. Ideas were developed expanded and mixed with contradictory concepts. Sequences were shuffled.

The aim was to extract much data, analysis and comment, then reduce everything down into the shortest possible time span. The forty-five minute function show became the best party because we got more bookings partly because that over all the audience could sit at any one stage. The reason of the action — a synthesis of ideas compressed into as few moments as possible developed directly from the manifestos and written pieces of the former Futurist theatre, a series of events around tumultuous theatrical energy and attack from myself. I spent obtaining the Living Theatre in London in 1969, a sense of anger and drive as a reaction to the mindless and soul destroying rigours of the so-called professional theatre. In this, our first, a profession based primarily on the demands of child-like ingenuousness and calculated mediocrity, a waste of the real profession scared to offend lest the nice grant should not come through scared to sacrifice the basic nature of its craft for fear that it be engulfed by the power of its own subtlety — a deep rooted fear of the unknown.

The underlying strength of great success and great failure is equal measure. To confront the unknown (related to ourselves, the future, and to confront one's personal fear of the future) one must first confront the source of one's fears. Honesty directly and with no blame attached. The foundations of our behaviour must be re-examined and qualified, from the most mundane to the most existential areas of our past. The path is one only. Once embarked on the journey there is no turning back with out a profound sense of giving up the struggle. And so to the last wall. Remove the foundations, prop or framework to your finale but move forward at all costs.

The costly lesson is simply not to overreach the terms of possibility — the levels of probability yes, but recognise the limitations, and recognise the beginning for what it is, believe in it (convincing everyone if you want but never believe that you've found the answer). Just one of them that is relevant personally or professionally to the moment — this precious moment in time that an actor and audience sit down together and play. And then tomorrow work out another one if necessary. And if you blow it one day there's another one tomorrow and it'll be better if you allow yourself to learn from the past. Just learn not worry. And somewhere in the middle of all this comes an abrogation of the public self. The name is the

paper, the agents, the audience, the dressing room, a consciousness on the private self with a preparation to show it if necessary, item it out there and show it. Hugh Kelly defines it in public.

This is a process, normally retained for works produced from the immediate hit by a single nation of directors, designers, managers, producers and actors. A company creating its own material is not shielded. Neglect the equation is there, rightly the response is there right or wrong. It's clear instantly that audiences respond sensitively, feelers — with a distinct possibility of either at any one moment. The user's edge of calculation in the fortifications the secretoids the fears and tastes that bind us all together, the common elements of the human condition.

Help! Back Roadsheets finished because we went too far — a rehearsal tape from March

seemed a little meaningless. So did the product of our hands to the audience. Some called it a poison to the new defence counter-culture offered a meaningless trivial aesthetic work. I choose the former. It only because if we had been working off it should have been more pleasant.

After two weeks being coaxed in Merriekiek you began to ask whether we had been coaxed, or were participating a theatrical version of the same process. The bassier, the unconsensual healer, started to figure heavily in the performances. Cases, Chapter. The problem of survival seemed to achieve an either/or situation — either embark on the S.L.A., 'Polly Heiman' equation or begin working again into regression internally in terms of the past and re-examine. The times had changed. The freezage had begun and the enemy was coming out from a mound of comic double talk, sarcasm &



Geoff Dinn, Andrew Heslop (left) and Louise Sanders present 'the brain' Meetthreef August

In January this year turned up onto the east coast and the real tasks — the socials of pride and prejudice, the love of death, the problems of staying alive. The one to Merriekiek turned to onto the stability of the resistance of most of the people out there, where questions of existential realities were irrelevant when considerations of where to get the next meal were at the mere importance while the survival instinct was paramount. And we couldn't sleep.

What little money we had was spent on our '78 project shall-beat La Roadshow Cafe', which involved setting up a complete restaurant/canteen providing sumptuous food for the audience while the company waited to eat the left overs. At that point it all seemed a little excessive. Two years into the project, with the prospect of another twelve months of little more than living costs to sustain us, it all

by well-meaning but socially unaware counter cultures and beginning to realise that perhaps it had been canned. We had lost sight of the art and sought our own reflections in the making mirror — we had attempted to be purveyors, sensuous, success or self destruction were in the air. Success meant everything we had worked against. Self destruction was ultimately consequential what we had been working for. Self destruction as a working unit. Our time was over. No one particularly noticed. Possibly as one particularly cared, but we did.

Little companies have been forming and dissolving with great regularity, touring right left and centre, both politically and geographically since we began. God help they continue to do so. The future of the nation's phoenix is in their hands — led by the time the nation needs them will be another group of people working hard to open up what we have been, and continuing to create. And that is the way it should be.



ANNA VOLSKA IN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD WHERRETT

R.W.: In the six years you've been back in Australia you've played a great variety of roles you were in the opening production at both Old and New National Theatres which were *Biggles* and *The Beached Anchovy* and then you've also played *Jessie's* in *Measure for Measure*, *Let Me Down*, *Angus in Alibi*, *Boris v Tom*, *Sara vs Matthew Cova*, *Jesters Outside us Harriet*, *Brutus* in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Queen Elizabeth* in *Richard II*, *Nina* in *The Seagull*, *Rebekah* in *One of the Teeth of China*, and *Anne* in *The Road Across Lake Constance*, outside of *Blithe Spirit* you've played *Meyer Berkoff* and the *Princess of France* (over in *Labour's Lost*) for the O.P.T. That must recently *Anne* in *Le Chateau de la Jeune St* seems plus the long running series *The Graduate* (in the women's winning Helen Redmond for *Entertainment*). I would like to begin by asking you three questions — which of these do you think was your best role, which do you enjoyed most and which was the greatest

challenge?

A.V.: I enjoyed particularly playing in *Brake Conscience*, probably because of the possibilities of the play. What I find most interesting about acting is observing, analysing, understanding people. And the most extraordinary thing about people to me and I would guess Peter Heskett at their deepest bemusement — what *Conscience* allows me to "discover" to understand an Author's context and to act it is definitely exciting. That pleasure was often by the difficulty of many of the audience's half-grasping it.

R.W.: That implies you do feel the need to communicate?

A.V.: Yes absolutely. But it is also important to communicate beyond an expected interaction — to surprise, to provide deeper principles of behaviour so add more to an audience a understanding than they entered

the theatre with.

R.W.: Your best role?

A.V.: I think *Anne* and *Blithe Spirit*. I understand *Blithe Spirit* and it means a lot to me. I sympathised with her and fitted the equipment which that particular production required. Not that this meant I was confident as a result.

R.W.: Why not?

A.V.: Because of the pressure on the role that it a famous role which had been played famously before and because John was directing.

R.W.: Then why was *Anne* your best?

A.V.: Simply because I suppose that is identification with her communicated itself to the audience.

R.W.: The greatest challenge?

A.V.: *Nina* or *Ophelia*. Because of the pauses they demand. I find it extremely difficult to let go to allow myself to moments of high feeling, as in *Ophelia*'s madness and *Nina*'s

dearly.

R.W. Did playing the roles assist the possibility of doing so?

A.V. Yes, but I still may not be able to do so. I feel time. I've learnt that it's not "right" as a role that I can do, but it won't be any easier getting there.

R.W. *Not Ready You or Not* she seems to me to be the funniest movie from you?

A.V. No. She requires only posturing. Through the shoving was more difficult initially.

R.W. By posturing, do you mean it made you feel strained?

A.V. Yes.

R.W. You've been acting for fifteen years. Are there roles you now never play which you'd like to have?

A.V. Juliet, I played Hira and Ophelia just in time. Small theatres at we have here are a virtue mostly, but are lacking in the way for actors — it's easier to see the lines! I'd also very much like to do something Jacobean — they're grand and absurd. Extravagant. People living in a very impossible but joyful world. The colourfulness of the situation as opposed to the grotesque of naturalism.

R.W. Are you ambitious?

A.V. Not after fifteen years now! And then I think my ambition is that the chance to do certain kinds of plays comes up so rarely. Besides, I'm done if it may be too late for me. The value of being older than one would be more able to make things happen.

R.W. Does this affect your work?

A.V. Yes. I'd love to. I think I'm difficult to cast. I'm not everybody's cup of tea. I'm individual to play lots of the kind of heroines coming out now. I hope my luck will come.

R.W. Are you afraid to have them?

A.V. Ted, one set of frustrations gets replaced by another wherever you go.

R.W. Why not if a person's working with John?

A.V. I'm already preparing the ground for next time. A *Novelty of Friends*. Nellie Wood says to Robert: "I'm in And and Carol and Ted and Alice." You always tell me what is

feel — That's how I feel. It's a double burden: firstly just having to be good coping with his preoccupation of the character. My concept of the character can't follow a pattern against his. They're in conflict. Secondly, he vents whatever energies he feels on me. A crude example would be that if I were not responding it is usually my character he will pounce on to wrangle with. He knows my characterisation is full growth before others because he knows my capability and believes me so well he can ignore ordinary social niceties. He disregards me, can then more easily turn to others. It's the result of both his nature of directing and our relationship. There are rewards as well of course. I feel myself to be a vulnerable actress, naturally fairly delicate and understanding and appreciated fully only by those who understand the medium. His appreciates that and encourages me.

R.W. You've been married sixteen years —

A.V. Together fourteen.

R.W. Do you feel pounced on any way by the women behind the scenes?

A.V. Yes a bit. He's very good at concealing his wounds. He's almost never found that temper or emotional outbreaks have someone to return to and recover with.

R.W. Do you enjoy any commerce?

A.V. Only in that he's able to make his career in an active way. I have no art passions.

R.W. Have you ever wanted to direct?

A.V. I've thought about it, but I'm temperamentally unsuited. I'm fickle. And belligerent.

R.W. What do you do when passive?

A.V. I enjoy analysing other people's work. I see how kind I'm a dramatic person. I have a penchant for being self-sufficient, of being able to make everything I need. I'd like to acquire all possible manual skills. But I hate being a housewife. There is a point at which that's I refuse to help the gather.

R.W. The sensations inherent in the profession don't satisfy your relationships?

A.V. We sometimes wonder that is is so good. We take care of course. One has to live



Anne Waldman at Brinsford in Richard Mervin's Much Ado About Nothing

wisely in any relationship.

R.W. What amazes you?

A.V. John death.

R.W. And?

A.V. (long pause) I don't know.

R.W. What embarrasses you?

A.V. So many things I don't know where to begin. Crying socially. Acting before you know what you're doing. Impressing. Delicous dinner parties. Other people wearing badly. Failing people's expectations — bills unpaid and letters unanswered. Measles of things. It is the most predominant emotion state.

R.W. What embarrasses you in others?

A.V. Observing people passing goss in when they don't know they're being watched. Careless. Lack of self-awareness.

R.W. Do you feel underposed?

A.V. I feel socially inept. I can't conduct a conversation with a stranger. I sit back myself in barrooms and hide in gardens till crowds disperse. I never go to cocktail parties and avoid large dinners. Because others see it as weakness. But in fact it springs from embarrassment and lack of confidence. I struggle forward, usually to fall back and hide.

R.W. Is there anything you'd like me to ask you?

A.V. I already feel like I'm mouthpiece. Perhaps I'd like to say this. That at this stage of things, with the age as well as the bland enthusiasm gone. I do feel I'm left with an interesting job.



and as Grahame in Richard Mervin's production of Hamlet

PUSHING THE PRAM

Lindzee Smith

What follows are collective recollections recorded in diary form of what one or any number of A.P.G. collective members may have seen or participated in during several days in April.

Sunday. That afternoon went off to the monthly collective meeting which happened to be the Annual General Meeting. Forty full collective members present, several associate members, some observers. Extensive reports and discussion about Programming, Financial Theatre Management, Actors and Writers Agency, Community Theatres, Community Radio and the Film Production Unit. Later attended a performance of *Scars in the Back* Theatre. This is a group developed show working with 4 number of images somewhat distinctly, given vague sense areas yet to be unravelled, but their potential will be further explored in the production given an "adults the-

program". Four actors in an evening of improvisations, songs and the genius of Bohne Roth. This project grew out of work done by some A.P.G. members in the usual workshops of Haworth Baker from New York. At this particular performance the Pram Factory video unit was taping the show, adding to the already large collection of video taped records the A.P.G. has of its events.

Monday. Travelled with the Community Theatre Group to the Government Clothing Factory to see a luncheon performance of their new piece *The Zoope Show*. A group of musicians, actors, jugglers, acrobats and singers exploring the effect of colonialism on

The Mills Family. Fay Makinson, Rob Melham, Tony Taylor, Sue Angleton, Ben Gifford, Toadie, and in front, Evelyn Krieger and Bob Thomeroff.



East Timor. Their own definition of the work. "Trilingual political circus with visual parades and lots of songs." They performed four supported and organised by the A.M.W.U. The group performing plays in the galleries to several hundred people — a difficult and demanding performance, but it works very well — information and entertainment. It urges support for *FREE TILMOR*.

This evening attended a supper show in the Front Theatre. There is a constant and growing use of the Playhouse by groups and people from outside the collective project. Bands-of-all-passions, musicians, megaphone poets, cabaret artists, political and cultural groups often fill the space during long nights, or days or weeks. On this particular night Eric Beach a young poet was presenting some of his recent work supported by jazz singer Judy Jacques.

Tuesday. Attended a rehearsal of Peter Hembel's *Self-Accusation* which is to begin at a show called *The Amazing Discount Show* which opens later this week. With the news to take Jack Hibberd's *A Tool in the Melode* to the National Theatre in St Kilda the collective has quickly created a programme to fill the gap which Melba would normally have occupied. Phil McPherson's *Peaking Odysseus* and *The Amazing Discount Show* to follow one another in the Front Theatre. Another production of a new Australian play, *Methinks* by Graham St Johnstone will begin a season in the Black Theatre at the same time.

Looked in on the Phoenix's Lounge briefly in the afternoon to find the Theatre Maintenance Group discussing the questions: Can we codetermine the risk of these changes? And What can we do with the rapidly disappearing Chrysalis USA?

This evening attended the opening of *Peaking Odysseus* adapted from George's *Deathwatch* by Melbourne writer Phil McPherson. Roles from the programme say "Peaking Odysseus is the twin of my first play *Whe-Wright* ... but demonstrates a change of consciousness within the central character during a social upheaval. A pyramidal hierarchical set of relationships is seen as a cell of the outside world and a struggle for power within it becomes a demonstration of the forces that have polarised society at large. The social upheaval in Peaking Odysseus is a series of unsuccessful mutations on board the prison-hulks as Port Phillips Bay during the gold rush."

Wednesday. Attended the Monthly Executive Meeting. The usual discussion of salaries — A.P.G. people determine their own salaries — plus other work to work problems after leaving a theatre audience operating. A number of people representing outside bands at other exec went present to negotiate for space to hold "supper shows". These have become regular weekend events at the Phoenix and feature different rock groups and other diverse acts. An interesting item of correspondence was a request from the Australian Embassy in Peking for the rights to perform *Awakende* by Jack Hibberd.

Late this afternoon caught a screening of the Playhouse film *Supermole* in the Carlton Film to go — a Marx Brothers' style indictment of smoking and the multi-national corporations who control the industry. The film was concerned, written, acted and compiled by A.P.G. collective members with a little help from their friends. This evening there is an early meeting of Playhouse Project, a project group set up to investigate and budget collective movie making — a group of actors, writers and film makers from both inside the

collective and outside.

Hembel Spent this morning working a rehearsal of the third edition of *Playhouse Family Show* in preparation for their forthcoming tour of Victorian country areas — a four week venture of great complexity. The Hills were busy negotiating details of the tour with the Arts Council of Victoria. Rehearsals also included — juggling, ventriloquism, an amazing yo-yoist, tight road reading, simultaneous dancing, juggling and a short play in verse, C.J. Dennis' *The Accidental Poet* by John Renshaw.

Visited the Thursday afternoon collective programming meeting. People met to discuss criteria for programming what plays/events should the A.P.G. present? Why? How? How can we balance our programme to include all the areas of interest — contemporary theatre, popular theatre, experimental, ensemble, pantomime, environmental theatre, musical events and so on. The meeting concluded with a prepared reading of *Boilermaker*, a new play by John Romani and John Timlin about the invasion by the American industry in the fifties and its subsequent effect on our culture. Other recent readings: *Wicker in the Spring* by Michael Berres, *Fanshaw and Knuckle* both by David Hass. *Suzette* by Robin Thornton.

Scuffed up a bit of tucker in the Tavern kitchen and managed to catch the A.P.G. puppets *Chicago Paperclip* on television in a re-enactment they did of the rock group Skidoo's lead instrument of the Palace in St Kilda. While the Hooks played *Lugion* St Lendo the quintet peppers appeared to complement the music on stage — Searched Janet the Owl the Moon and all the old favourites from *How High was my Nooit*. *The Owl and the Pussywillow*, *The Sheepish Child* and *How Gray was my Rose*.

Tonight is opening night of *The Amazing Discount Show*. Alwyn Green space took down in a corner of the front theatre next to Peter Corlett's *Peaking Odysseus* set, running about forty or so seats. This show started around 9.15 with *Peaking Odysseus* finishes. The programme — soup, Bob and Joe meat, Samuel Beckett, and *Self-Accusation* by Peter Hembel. *Deathwatch* is giant, *Whe-Wright* and *Joe's* adaptation of *Art without Worth* and it is very funny the art of *Self-Accusation* live microphones speaking and a megaphone. *Self-Accusation* is a tightly compressed drama but using the spoken word. Powerfully, impulsively and sympathetically it traces the way society processes the individual and how the developing individual reacts back. There are now five plays running simultaneously under A.P.G. auspices, another. *Suzette* by Robin Thornton is in rehearsal just as another group prepares the groundwork for a forthcoming production of *AC/DC* by Heathcote Williams.

Friday. Presented in an early rehearsal for Super Noose *Rebel* on the production — A project group of ten A.P.G. members is working as the play therefore the rehearsal of discovery and design involves the entire cast. They are using a variety of approaches in order to understand and communicate the many types of performance the play demands. About the play — the central section of *Super Noose* deals directly with an attempt by eight women prisoners to organise group resistance by themselves against the prison authorities. They barricade themselves into their cell and then face the pressure of maintaining group strength during the long night until their action is discovered but the play doesn't remain a purely internal/social drama with a passive (even if concerned) audience. Act 1 and 2 open the action out to bring the



Kerry Dwyer, Jenny Jones and Jane Clifton in rehearsal for *Suzette*.

audience's reactions into direct confrontation with the people they entertain across shock, threat and because the audience of elasticity in the stories being performed against them. In the process of doing this they feel solidarity they are unable to achieve in their rebellion in the cell.

This afternoon a presentation with the building committee of the new Victorian Arts centre to discuss the possibilities of the proposed studio space there, the nature of events to be staged there, how it will be used, problems of seating and environmental staging. Later a meeting of Playhouse Project, a project group within the collective working out the details for the making of larger budget films of works like Hibberd's *Danvers* (invention for the screen), the group developed *High Family Show* and *Curly's Androcles*.

On the 11.30 supper show last night two after all these events have finished for the night (Marion burst out, bump!) a new band *Salutes*. Unique band in that both player and guitar, violin and songwriters are women. They perform three sets (an acoustic bracket in the middle). Some songs: *Women in Trouble*, *Pre-Menstrual Blues*, *The Man... Nights in the Parlour* (about marriage perverts), *You Don't Own Me*.

Saturday. An early morning casting meeting for AC/DC. The project group meets to discuss the possibilities before deciding the cast. Casting is completed after exercises and open

discussion about repertory, work methods etc — a difficult and exhausting process but necessary.

Out to St. Kilda to see *A Town to Melba* at the Repertory Theatre. A major event for all at the Prism Factory — a vastly new experience first in terms of audience volume (500 at the Prism and 1000 in the National) and second in terms of staging — proscenium staging presents a whole range of new problems to be tackled by actors, director and designer. The move to the larger space, the drive for a mass audience seems central to Hobson's desire to create Australian popular theatre. In his words, it theatre of accessibility — Australian in theme and audience which deals with legendary figures and events — mythically planted in the nation's consciousness.

Raised back from St. Kilda to enjoy the May Day Supper Show at the Prism. A celebration and preparation for the May Day march tomorrow. A wild, extravagant, impetuous evening. Performance by the Community Theatre Group of *The Town Show* and its band the Vipers. Brecht songs by collective members. Broken political songs (jokes). Our nearly like the rest of the participants by Eric Bouch.

Sunday May Day March — members of the collective gather with the Community Theatre Group and musicians to march to the Yarra bank. On the march we join with F.I.L.E.F. (Union of radical Italian immigrants) to sing peasant songs and music from Brecht's *The Mother*. At the Yarra bank another performance of *Die Kneipe* (She Returned to Gerlin and decided to go off to La Mina for a night off). Michael McIurra (Gangster) O'Farrell — guest fun. Another week in the streets comes to an end.

Tatertown



Shane (Green Eyes), Paul McNeilly (La Franc) and Rod Bustow (Measures) in A.P.G.'s *Peking Orders*

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THE BRITISH SCENE

LANGUISHING IN LONDON

Alan Seymour

ALAN SEYMOUR is perhaps the best known of our 2000 amateur playwrights. He plays the One Day of Our Year (1961) that never came into existence — never mind because it was written in 1961 — but because it has been performed in every year since its first production in 1962. Alan has now written his second one-act comedy — *What's New?* — which has been well received at the last two Fringe Festivals. Alan has been writing for 15 years. Seymour's first play, *The Last Days of London*, with no serious laughs and 97% tragicomedy, was a highly successful one.

The single most decisive factor in English theatre in the past six months has been the great British heatwave. Temperatures of up to 95° every day for weeks on end are as unusual here as to have stupefied the local people and to have even more thousands of empty seats than ever. 'For the first time,' said an English friend, 'I understand why you've had such a problem establishing a viable living theatre in Australia.' With the long summer evenings there is little inclination to rush to one's friendly neighbourhood theatre to see the RSC, Marlowe, or whatever, as they go through the usual, daily round: *One Day*, or *O'Neill*, or epic five-hour trudge. The Phoenix Company or an ad hoc company funded by a famous performer, and with such starry talents as Glenda Jackson, Judi Dench and Frances de la Tour, will be welcome in Western Australia's rock-bottom modernisation, surprisingly, by Edward Bond; instantaneous by a usually reclusive television and film director Michael Lonsdale Hogg.

One London theatre at least is unimpeachable: the Lyttleton, the only one of the National Theatre's three auditoria to be functioning so far. On the South Bank of the Thames, the National's vertical and horizontal sweep of concrete is first sight unappealing, grossly dramatic, isolating and designed to allow broad spectrum layers with bare walls, exhibitions, bookstalls and rooms for a chamber music group or young ensemble to play to visiting theatregoers. The oddly hypocritical poster

The National Theatre is IDIOTIC, with its self-consciously primitive pricing and layout to suggest a simple gretna or a brick wall, may make one squirm when set against the malady of highly-priced seats and the total lack of any attempt to involve the huge working class and lower middle class population of South London.

The Lyttleton's opening season has been a shambles after a disastrous let-down after a century's campaigning for a National Theatre. Albert Finney's Hamlet alone, straight with no atmospheric directorial twists of

interpretation, is impressive enough though uncharacteristically slow in design and pace; cast in some of the supporting roles, especially by Angela Lansbury, Siân Williams and Dennis Quilley who shall be remembered.

John Osborne's *What It Wasn't* Down is another odd example of how middle-aged middle-class petulance, dally and bally expressed in heavily symbolic language and presented in a heavily symbolic set which has all the subtlety and delicacy of a forced hamburger. 50-year-old Ben Masters, currently forgettable after a generation of neglect, is represented by Pilkington in uniform, encloath juvenile example of the English theatre of the 1950s when it was at its lowest level for three hundred and fifty years. Michael Beckmann's direction seems intended to have conscious or unconscious, the author's nastiness, in sometimes playing off the top of the text as though its base value had not plummeted as low as stinging, and sometimes seeming to suggest a touch of malvolent hindsight.

In this review the first new play by one of the younger English playwrights makes an astounding impact. Howard Brenton's *Weapons of Massacre* is another of his lessing studies in contemporary politics, following worthily upon *Magnificence*, *Breazzaack* and *The Churchill Play* (the two texts written in collaboration with David Hare) and the television play *The Selvks McRabbie*. A stunningly economical version of the last part of Cocteau's *Under Western Eyes* Mr Brenton makes his point about the crassness, unreality and hopelessness self-explanatory to many of the West's coniferous young political ideologues. The oddly hypocritical poster

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in *Magnificence* seen a few years ago of the Royal Court is himself a malvolent, seeing the deep need of change, nervous of the repercussions that change may bring. The malvolence makes for a richness in his response. As always, the language is terse economical, charged with urgency, and compassion for his characters comes through without heart-breaking sympathy but with understanding tempered by omission of their shortfalls of humanity. The Lyttleton stage previously the subject of some controversy comes into its own in David Hare's surprising and authoritative production, displaying its depth height, mechanical resources and massive adjuncts such as sound and lighting effectively and to dazzling effect.

This theatre season was also that suddenly promising period when the newer dramatists — from what used to be called the fringe but is now more accurately referred to as the Alternative Theatre — have been allowed by management into the West End. Such enterprising managers as Michael G很想 and Michael Wincott have risked transferring plays from the tiny Bush Theatre, from Hackney or Liverpool Rep, in the hope that at least they would find a larger audience ready for them. Also the hope that '78 would be the pivotal year in which Alternative Theatre breakthrough to a wide international and — thanks to the tourist influx — world audience and the ageing West End would be refreshed and invigorated has not been realised.

Concordia (Trevor Griffiths) had a short, highly-praised but rather too sexist, *King Lear* at Wyndham's. David Hare's *Death of a Salesman* at the same address closed even more rapidly despite a visionary performance from Nobby



Still running... Mike Stott's *Hurly Burly*. Fronted by (L to R) Nick Stringer, Susan Cameron, Diane Cusick, Richard Beckinsale and Jane Waller. Photo: Donald Cooper

Moscow at the alcoholic, seedy rock singer Mapple, Stephen Poliakoff's *City Song*, in spite of the Frank Marcus review having it as the most brilliant debut by a young (23-year-old) playwright in half a century, played to audience hour... and... and after about six weeks. Ted Whipplehead's following to his megamatic Alpha state, the usual comedy Old/Feminist could hold an audience even in the much smaller and mediocritously quotientient Arts Theatre. Only Mike Batt's a farce, *Fancy Paradise*, warning advertised as "out-dated", is still running after successive Liverpool, then the Merchant and now in the West End. Still can write superbly emoting dialogue and create characters in comic funniness. He is notably uninterested in considerations of "good taste", interested those uninterested who offered to play the part into London if the first seven were cut, and was rewarded by having Cedars bring it in, so that its new laughs claimed a besieged and bedridden young man receiving a multiple blow job from his wife and another girl, dentures a audiences highly Herald Hobson, varieties Sunday Times, wrote soon to reinforce it, if respectable for right-minded cheetahgoons by pointing out that the young has died (unironically played by Richard Beckinsale) is torn between delight and agony as his formerly repressed wife gives him what he has always wanted he wants from her — and sometimes shocks him in the process.

Surprisingly though the public response has been to Gifford, Haze, and Poliakoff (though in my view his is as yet very much a prima jettywings), one could discuss these ventures as failures. A play has only so done at the Royal Court (and now, one estimates, the National) much less the West End for courses no come pouring in from abroad all over Western Europe and somewhere the USA. Most English playwrights, in fact, earn more from European, German, Scandinavian, and Dutch royalties than they ever do from their own country.

An investigation into why these kind theatres cannot be filled for more than a few weeks by the often exciting work of new and newish playwrights at overture and has not been properly begun in the British press. Is it that older theatregoers are dying off or are too old to be satisfied making the trip? Something with which they sense they will be out of sympathy? Middle aged theatregoers may stay away because the terms of reference and even the terminology of some of the younger writers is baffling to them. An intelligent and sympathetic couple I know simply did not understand some of the slang and idiom of *Death 'n' Stiletto*, a play about a rock group disintegrating and could find no point of sympathy with the aspirations or disengagements of the otherplayers. "Comedians" lambaste those rough comics whose "jokes" stand fire in end-of-the-pier summer diversions, variety houses, working men's clubs and on television, are based on racial and sexual stereotypicality and by extension, ridicule the audience which laughs at them. The metropolitan theatre audience, however, is like it or not, mainly middle-class and unlikely to have been top part theatre, a class or even wrench the rubbery programmes on television. The play makes a dignified and stirring distinction between false comedy which flatters audience prejuice and true comedy which probds open a truth. It means, however, probably alienates most audiences except those already approving the author's postures. His power and eloquence are undermined. His assumptions are wrong and essentially anti-dramatic.

If the traditional theatre-leaves, the older and middle aged, largely others from sampling brain produce, why is there not a new young generation replacing them, as has happened in every previous generation since the literate audience developed? An answer may be that very Prince theatre which turns up the raw English jettywings and other talents in the first place. Since the mid-'60s regeneration has found the small, emerging often half-novice

campagnes springing up in basements, attics and rooms behind pubs, offering classes it shared in a free flowing form the related '60s model was returned to. For a decade now that audience has frequented such informal venues and has not sought the habit of going to the theatre in the old sense. What is unknown is suspect. Much of this generation's view has been articulated by the weekly magazine and culture guide, *Time Out*, which with a kind of inverted snobbery and even perhaps a new kind of aristocraticism, nevertheless is now seen on plays produced by commercial management in the West End theatre, their gilt and plush and crowded little lobbies and proscenium arch stages keeping actors and audience in a certain distance seeming to sum up all the new consciousness have most hated. It is also claimed that what has come to be called the *Time Out* audience cannot afford West End prices. But then is that some late-teens through to early 20s generation which buys in-store-in-the-movies gets to the West End movies, theatre prices are high, buys reproductions, pictures and novels, runs lots inexpensive gigs like pop bands and eats out at highly-priced West End restaurants. And how much *Time Out* is half in earnest?

In all this, surprisingly, expedites something free to go and it seems to be the theatre. And yet the "commercial" now rapidly increasing the uncommercial and ready itself to profit by sub-subsidies has changed become less snobby. Nobody dresses formally anymore goes as they want to, and a really good mixed audience at a good play is one of the new experiences of a really democratic gathering one can have in old England. Some of the missing generation might equally enjoy the theatre if they could only bring themselves to go.

But the cool generation, oddly passive and private, after all the public huzzah-rugger of the '60s, is deriving itself this age-old egotistic pleasure. It cannot be only for economic reasons. What will somebody tell us why?

National Theatre Complex on the South Bank of the Thames



Amateur

THE ART OF AMATEUR ACTING

David Goddard

DAVID GODDARD is a free-lance director and writer. From the Arts Council before he has experience at a number of amateur festivals and conducted seminars and directed numerous amateur groups. He was recently invited writer-in-residence at the Royal and Derngate working as an editor with *Regional Dramatist* T.R.

little amateur groups were left; this is where their thinking has stopped. They have not yet been caught up in the last 'No Longer-Magical world of Modern itself'.

For many years the super-suburbia and the country areas were fed professional drama from large and small-scale tour companies. These fell away through financial pressures, management and the lack of certain actors (the 'expatriates' of the so-called profession) of that professional behaviour who writes it off? The magicians were no longer prepared to venture away from the peer-surety of the capital cities, so leaving the job to the apprentices who were unaware of the importance of their job or their responsibilities to their profession and their management when all 'mystery' would set them, so it didn't really matter!

Bringing Theatre to these areas served a great need, but as the standards in performance and presentation fell, so did

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After you have made up your face — with a Velvet Puff, firmly press (or other blending powder, three strokes are essential) into the make-up, including the hair — brush off surplus powder with soft cotton-wool pad. If conditions are hot, set the make-up even more firmly by dabbing the powdered surface with water or Astringent soaked cotton-wool pad — remove perspiration by patting face with wet towlettes — do not re-powder.

opendances — quite naturally — and to self-respect. Why should areas that can boast good home-grown actors and productions, waste time, energies and expertise on professional productions that were more or less inferior?

This repetition of the professional has caused a stamp, however; has left a void; no longer can smaller amateur groups find a gauge, with no yardstick to measure their progress they too must suffer. The new trends in theatre fresh air can only be read about or in best discussed second-hand. At a recent country one-act drama festival a small group was criticised for playing a modern play in an old fashioned way. A speaker for the group, quite reasonably, asked: "How Do We Know what is the right style to play?" We pull up a chair, read it and do it, the why we know how — if the style has passed us by. How do we know?"

Surely this must be a problem facing many amateur groups and societies. There is no lack of talent in such organisations, one has only to attend festivals in Wigan, Wrexham, Newcaste, and those once held by the Arts Council in bigger days, and one, to see the ability, the uniqueness and the potential.

But to return to Mr Green's Coarse observation — "impossible to do well without any intention of wanting to impress." Too often the people involved are not prepared for change and development. Mr A and Mrs B become non-discriminators and, through lack of vision, imagination, experimentation (possibly because they don't wish to lose personal power), they smother the development of a group. "We're only amateurs, you know, in it for the fun and frolicsome" — but still charging admissions!

What needs to be faced is that amateur theatre must develop with the times, as do all other art forms, and where money is concerned especially, it is the audience that has to be considered. So standards have to be set, to be maintained and checked. This is where festivals are of most importance, not as competition but as a means of exchanging ideas, of seeing what is being done elsewhere and what higher standards are being achieved.

The amateur producer takes great pride and joy in his enterprise, he nourishes the ground, puts out the weeds, throws away the poor plants, prunes for drainage, sets the new season's annuals, and the new strains of perennial. He goes to flower shows, talks for hours over the fence comparing notes, maybe he'll go to a competition or two to see how he stands. But, whatever, he's delighted when someone praises his display. "Oh it's just a hobby something I like to do."

You. But what a lot of hard work has been put into it!"

F.A. invites amateur groups to respond to this article, and generally to see this page as their answer.

Film, Television and Radio

AUSTRALIAN TV - A MESSY COMPROMISE?

Brian Bell

ADRIAN JONES is an Executive Producer with the Australian Broadcasting Commission's television arm as a producer-manager. He has been involved in television programming for a long time, as programme controller for ABC-TV, as an executive producer and director, producing many series. His present post directs the serial drama *Reindeer*, based on Norman Mailer's controversial novel.

Just as the Australian stage has been instrumental in establishing an image of郊游 (more refined than ours, no doubt), argued Brian Bell, should the Australian TV industry, in an article which sets a basis for future discussion of the process behind the medium:

Most of the television programmes transmitted in prime time in Australia are made for audiences in either Great Britain or the United States of America.

The Americans and the British both approach television in a way that is related to their commanding sense of life and both produce good programmes.

What about Australian television? We drive on the left — and spend millions of dollars a year to see American films.

Twenty-a-week of ABC-TV's *Power Writers* (hosted by John Cleese) offers Australian audiences no British movies (Australian films)

We take a day off to celebrate the Queen's Birthday — and encourage the Americans to build up their forces in Vanuatu and then neutralise it in the Indian Ocean. We discuss contentious issues — but only in terms of black and white. We recognise and delight in our natural resources — and draw on outside counsel and expertise to develop them.

Television here, like many elements in our society seems to be a messy compromise between American and British models.

On the one hand we set up long running series like *Murder*, *Carsick*, *Wenters* and *King & Me* without either the background of market research and definition of social attitudes that sustain a programme's success, or a continuing and profitable product diffusion (distributed) or the task in a single television controller who can give the programme an immediacy, a provocative quality (indeed).

On the other hand we take a smattering role, then limit and qualify it and caterise it.

The bigger in the woodpile is "the Committee". In Australia this means the Executives of a commercial TV channel — or a group of Public Servants at the ABC. For better or worse these intermediaries have enormous influence. They not only assess programme ideas but check and change script production schedules and techniques. Having no before-the-event market research, and only the most general and often conservative definition of

BRITISH T.V.

* British television is a step in a long march

* Social commentators stretch from Joanne Adcock through Samuel Johnson to Aster Cook while critics from Ben Jonson through Oscar Wilde to Alun Gwynn and John Cleese popular social storytellers from Chaucer through Dickens and Evelyn Waugh to Philip Larkin and Ted White.

* Debate has always been a popular British sport and television quickly became a forum as well as a means of presenting a variety of shades of opinion on firebrands, newspapers, and the like.

* In debate debate has always been more important than theory and action.

* For instance, when Pridemore's integrity was questioned, a cabinet minister's honesty and vulnerability because matrix of public debate. Pridemore resigned but debate continued academically, historically, morally, politically, ideologically, philosophically and generally.

* When an idea for a television programme comes the agreed British pattern is for senior members of a production organisation to consider it and if it is found acceptable, approach a writer or an expert with a commission and deadline. The writer is expected to fulfil the world around him/her's story and write a one-off play (David Mercer, *A Suitable Case for Treatment*) or test with acquaintances in an unscripted week and adapt it (Gillian Riven). The Pridemore affair contributes something of his own attempt to expand on a running series. (Niven Jones, *Bedevil* at last) The expert is given research staff and/or nudging producer Kenneth Clarke turns up with *Contraband* — Bronowski with *The Ascent of Man*.

* In Britain the producer compensates for those thin resources, staff and capital by having an idea or an expert and then the results will be worthwhile.

* As British debate produces a myriad of shades of opinion, so British television produces a large number of programmes covering a wide range of experience.

Over a period of 14 years, the BBC produced 60 episodes of *Skins and Sons* — that was all the writers, Gatton and Simpson, had in them to write.



The audience they rely on — aspiration and overseas models for decisions. It would be interesting to know the number of programmes ideas — ideas worth the testing — that individuals and production companies like Crawford's have presented to these committees only to see them disappear along with the scratch and the clatter.

The American attitude of developing a solidly-based, market-oriented populist, and the British attitude of faith and hope in a programme idea seem to be akin. As Huw Wheldon said in a recent lecture: 'No real movement can start from scratch; it is a continuous

AMERICAN T.V.

- American television is a step in a long march
 - The ability to adapt, process and market the resources of local situations from the pioneers through Rockefellers, Edison and Al Genna to DeSoto and Don Martin; popular entertainers stretch from Mark Twain through W.C. Fields to Mervin Tyler Moore.
 - This brief target of American culture has always been the welding together of peoples drawn from all sorts of the world — giving an otherwise divided nation a single aim, a single drive, a corporate identity.
 - In America decision and action have always been more important than debate.
 - For instance when Haldeman's integrity was questioned, public opinion burst into a torrent of denials and testimonials refuting the claim that a member of the President's Executive staff was directly involved with death funds and dirty tricks. On his independent path again turned Haldeman into an ugly man in an un-American situation.
 - When an idea for a television programme crosses the refined American pattern is for the producer to get together with advertisers and network men to sell the idea, check its marketability, develop it and set up the staff, facilities and capital to guarantee a long run.
 - In America an idea or service is "launched" by the producer, the advertiser and the network, unless especially bypassed by those responsible for the capital throughout the production — maximizing the chances of failure and minimizing the chances of profit.
 - An American know-how and capital produces a well-travelled range of consumer goods within a narrow range as American television produces a wide number of products on a limited number of themes.
 - After the American FBI bought the formula and turned it into *Sheriff and Son*, they produced 260 episodes in 5 years.



"I'd like to help you Sonny, but like you can see... . . . my hands are tied."

You insure yourself against failure by having one, but you also insure yourself against triumph.

Seldom do Australian television programmes hint where it hurts, or where it tickles. Perhaps this is inevitable. Refugee war programmes lack precision and impact because our society itself lacks definition, lacks clear aims, is compromised amalgam of attitudes and aspirations informed from Great Britain and America. We measuring questions like, prefer comfortable, rather than honest answers — so that Billy and Perry Fawcett, and Peter and Pauline, now write novels.

We like national arms being spelled out but don't like being bound by them — so that achieves little work when others are bad, rope are nice and psychology is followed only a token nod.

by country EQUITY NEWSPAPER (part 7 P.D.) nothing more than a noisy compromise of American and British models. Isn't there something elsewhere on our screen that suggests particular and individual themes, attitudes and forms that speak directly and provocatively to the audience and therefore develop their own particular production systems and styles?

Yes well Number 86 and Normie-Gunstone have an individuality which I'm rather glad about without answer, problems without resulting catastrophe and all in an absence of emotional anguish way that is in tune with other popular Australian entertainers namely the theatre restaurants. Reg Livermore, Frank Hardy's novels, David Williamson's plays, The Legends of King O'Malley, Mo Norman Lindsay's novels and cartoons, C.J. Dennis, Henry Lawson.



ABC-TV has been shooting a scene of *Citizen Woman* with Rue Gordon as Adela Stone and Elizabeth Taylor as Anna.

Theatre-In-Education

TIE-ING UP AUSTRALIA

Margaret Leesek

MARGARET LEESK is the Information Officer for the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association and now also works as a producer and director for a small touring People's Theatre Company in New South Wales. A former member of the Elizabethan Phoenix Troop's Troop, she is also present Assessment of the National Playwrights Conference.

The Australian Youth Performing Arts Association, which was established in 1974, is a co-ordinating resource and information body based at the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust with branches and representatives in each state. The main purpose is to provide a communication network for all people working in the performing arts for youth — kids, teachers, students, actors, writers etc. At present we have a consultant travelling throughout Australia talking to amateur and professional groups and individuals — the aim being to find out the training problems and needs in this field. Emerging from this is a basic need for some material for groups to work on. We are investigating ways of publishing scripts — by that I mean making them accessible. We have to find inexpensive ways of producing multiple copies. AYPA is a member of the drama forum education alliance (DSEA), which has similar aims throughout Australia. Conference last year in East Berlin did much to make very aware that most European countries have an enormous amount of children's theatre and plays. But their beliefs do not readily relate to our audiences — partly because ours are based on folk tales and traditions rather than and partly because the tradition and experience of theatrical going is different to ours. Australian children have a sensitive ear of television which influences their responses as a theatre audience. Above we haven't really a heritage of children's literature.

I feel very strongly children's theatre should be trying to do something like and television can do — otherwise there is not much point doing it.

Most companies working for young people are involved in one or more of the following activities: firstly, the workshop situation with kids and/or fathers devising their own scripts, which may not be acceptable in conventional theatre terms but they are relevant entertainments. They tend to be largely impromptu and often not written down with all their intentions.

Secondly, holiday weekend, pantomime type productions and it seems that only

amateur theatres do that now as few major companies find it worth their while. It can be very expensive to mount a full production which only runs at weekends at school holidays.

And thirdly, *Theatre-in-education*. The documentary and social comment style seems at present the most exciting form and is probably, as is the case in England, only experimental theatre. It appears in this area of present, that until the actor-teachers have worked together for a while they need writer to pull together their research, ideas and attitudes and the theatrical elements to make it a lively and informative statement.

TIE is fairly new in Australia — until recently only Pageant Theatre were working in this area and this year there are only a few people experienced in presenting theatre in-relation to school audiences.

This is a need for writers and others with a commitment to this area and a willingness to research historical and social material to be able to work with a company. It's no good however making a performance-in-schools (ie a slightly illustrated lesson) — it has to be different from what the teacher can do whilst at the same time being aware of how the teacher can extend the experience in future lessons. Many companion projects follow up interest for teachers as awareness grows that a theoretical statement is not very effective in relation to the passed and future career paths of the audience for whom it is intended.

I don't want to create the impression that I am disapproving the formal play experience for young people — it should go hand in hand with the drama and theatre-in-education experience — as long as it's relevant and doesn't threaten the merged three dimensional elements of theatre — and that's the problem at present — very few plays for children (mostly from overseas) are relevant and in the English terms there is still the attitude that second best is okay for children — that they don't know the difference — but I think they do.

The following is a brief description of some of the groups working in Australia — it is not possible to include them all but it does show that a lot of activity is going on mostly separately by a small number of committed enthusiasts — somewhat out of the mainstream of theatrical activity. There is as yet little recognition in this country that people working in the performing arts for young people etc effectively a continuation of creative artists and educationalists.

In Western Australia on-kids-a-Activities Tree Society offers a combination of creative arts activities and they also start schools occasionally. Little Patch Theatre do performances for children in houses. The National Theatre at the Playhouse conduct

youth workshops and have taken productions into schools and country areas. The Western Australian Institute of Technology have a student group — Theatre-go-round — which tour schools.

In N.S.W. there is the Australian Theatre-for-Young-People attached to the Old Tote Theatre company. For some time they did holiday productions of things like *The Owl and the Pussycat* but they found it too expensive and audience appeal has lessened. Now they have two TIE teams working in schools and also conduct workshops for young people regularly. Pageant Theatre has been touring



A school audience watching the Tasmanian TIE Team presenting a history of Australian Trade Unions (continued)

schools for about 11 years with programmes devised especially for the company. They work with either short scenarios with the actors encouraging contributions from the audience or they do verse and musical comedy and prose being studied by students. The scenario sets up certain logical steps towards a possible ending with the kids filling in the details. The Independent Theatre presents regular Saturday matinees for young audiences. In productions of this kind musical plays an important part — often families join with new words add variety to the performances. Marion Street Theatre is similar to the Independent — they conduct workshops and classes and have holiday seasons — often at puppet shows. Kids Activities in Tasmania works in the creative arts area and Seamer Student Theatre begins recently at the new Seymour Centre in Sydney where students work for two to three months at the endother



It's on in there! by Anne Murray. The team includes John Norwell, Alan Westfield, Darryl Dibben and Jenny Sanders and are attached to the Tasmanian Theatre Company.

In South Australia the Adelaide Festival Centre has a TIE team as does the South Australian Theatre Company based at the Playhouse. Another TIE team is Troika, based at a primary school, but touring widely. Posh Theatre is a puppet theatre which uses live performances as well as does the Paperbag Company.

In Tasmania besides the Tasmanian Theatre Education Team attached to the Tasmanian Theatre Company, there are a number of Youth Theatres who conduct workshops and present youth productions.

In Victoria Children's Arena Theatre runs the schools with audience participation programmes and plays for young people.

The Australian Children's Theatre run by Joan and Betty Raynor was the pioneer in

Australia in this field. The Raynors now mainly entrepreneurial programmes — such as Richard Bradbury's Shadow Puppets. The Melbourne Theatre Company has a number of TIE teams and conducts youth workshops. Other groups in Victoria working in TIE include the Drama Resource Centre, the Magic Mosaic Mime Troupe and Centrepiece.

In Queensland there are some very active groups. The Queensland Theatre Company has presented some excellent TIE programmes. Twelfth Night Theatre recently appointed a Youth Director and they conduct workshops, present matinees and run a TIE project called Early Childhood Project for young school students. They are involved in a project to bring a Children's Theatre director from Germany to direct a production there later this year (despite being short on writers we also look directionally in this field).

The main amateur theatres Arts Theatre and La Bonté also present children's plays and in the Northern Territory there is an active theatre in education theme in education group based at Brown's Flat Community Arts Centre.

Throughout Australia there are groups working for young audiences seeking relevant scripts, sets and people committed to the area. However, the attitude in Australia to Children's Theatre has largely been that it is the poor country cousin. Arts, theatre companies, directors, funding sources and training schools usually see children's theatre as a stepping stone into adult theatre or as a fill-in if you want to do nothing. Australia is writing is another — there are little financial or critical rewards — so why bother?

I do believe if you are going to have an audience (parents) you have to give them interesting theatre experiences now — before they find alternative leisure activities. Writers must be encouraged — without being led to think that a good way to learn the craft is by knocking out a few children's plays. It must be as good as adult theatre, if not better!



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE- INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE

The International Theatre Institute was chartered by UNESCO in 1948 to promote the exchange of knowledge and practice in the Theatre Arts. Eleven nations were represented at this first meeting in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Today ITI Centres exist in twenty countries around the world, with a central office at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The ITI in Australia is situated at 153 Dowling Street, Pyrmont Point on the second floor of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust building. It offers the use of a small but quite comprehensive theatre library which includes plays (mostly Australian), magazines from all over the world and technical books on stage design (lighting etc).

Every three months it lists and prints in Australian Theatre Landscapes "all Australian

Playbills and Australian plays presented around Australia".

Once every six months the Sydney Office sends information about Australian Theatres to Paris for inclusion in the magazine International Theatre Information which has a worldwide circulation twice a year. For this reason we send a green form to all theatres presenting overseas performances of which they complete and return for the filing and reference directory. In this register we are also endeavouring to keep a file for historical reference on the development of Australian Theatre and its writers.

The Sydney office is authorised to present ITI cards to presenting organisations from the world area of the theatre arts for their convenience when travelling abroad. This assures them of immediate contact with

people in the theatrical scene in any of the seventy countries they may visit. With this card is also given an address list of all the ITI Centres — which makes it possible to write and headstand to find out any information which may be required in performance, festivals schools etc. By this same token we in Sydney extend the same courtesy to overseas travellers introducing them to theatres, Australian plays and people. The ITI representatives in each of the States who are in constant contact with the Sydney office and are willing to be involved in all theatrical events, particularly those which include the development of Australian theatre. They are in Melbourne — Garrie Hutchinson, South Australia Margaret Gay Tasmania Diana Large, A.C.T. Julian Hoast, Queensland Atkins Sekule and Western Australia Mervyn Lake.

Technical

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE TECHNOLOGY

Darryl Wilkinson
Ian McKenzie

IAN MCKENZIE has been a member of the Australian Performing Arts Council since its inception. A photographic historian and writer, he has written a book on the history of the arts in Australia and has recently edited a book on the early days of Australian theatre. He is currently the General Secretary of the Australian Theatre Critics' Society. He is also a director for Alternative Theatre Company. He recently gave a documentary film presentation on theatrical reforms. *Theatre* in 1971 for La Mure.

experience of its problems is limited to those people. Those traditional theatre people thrust into the environment of alternative theatre often do not understand its many staging problems.

Alternative theatre is not flexible by nature, but must become so in order to be accessible to the audience. The difference between alternative theatre and proscenium arch is essentially priorities so that the perspective of the production is **REAL**, and not artificially enhanced, e.g. raised stages, dropping borders, and Ellen John-Yellow Brick Road deformities.

There is a departure away from the old theory of illusion towards a theatre of honesty where the machinery of production is unashamedly exposed. The traditional roles of those involved have to be re-examined — for example, the role of the designer changes from that of producing an *artistically* two-dimensional picture frame setting to that of creating a three-dimensional environment which involves not only actor, but audience with actor, thus heightening dramatic

communication. Freeing the actor from the prison of the proscenium arch. However, puts the technical staff into their own prison because the scenic arm has been essentially removed. Alternative theatre relies more heavily on Sound and Light to create atmosphere.

The traditional concept comes with its unobstructed and uninterrupted view of the stage — a view leading to loss of stage control and therefore, loss of stage control. For this reason everyone in an alternative theatre production needs to rethink their role. Artists need to be more responsible for props and properties and possible alterations, so that the proscenium arch deformation, lines of responsibility, is much less obvious. The role of the Stage Manager can be converted into the *Tongue* of production with Theatre by the use of such things as Closed Circuit TV for overall stage vision to cue actor, light and sound but that is perhaps an unworkable expense. One alternative practice with them factory is for the lighting and sound operator to follow the show through all rehearsals as it

The trek towards the discovery of Alternative Theatre Technology is littered with the legacies of Proscenium Arch practices. Whilst normally we would be wary of practitioners supplying solutions to the problems of alternative theatre, it seems at the moment that

Darryl Wilkinson abhors the "cherry-picker", respects a designer like OPEN STAGE'S Steve College

Ian McKenzie demonstrates the Beyond SP20 rehearsal control desk to students at the State College, Vic.



part of the cost. So well do they know the show with this total involvement that if we enter drops in a pile of script this is immediately reacted to. No piece here for the cipher will impress Project A on the card and goes back to the novel. A Stage Manager in the Production is used to fulfil functions where a high degree of mobility is required or there is a lack of time for actors to perform these functions. The lighting and sound operator, however, are quite possibly part of the audience, or at least in full view.

As costs change, so do the technical needs. Technical equipment must be flexible to cope with these needs, but we have inherited the equipment from our own training from the practitioners such theatre, and there is no sign of a new generation of equipment, although there is fortunately a new generation of alternative theatre techniques as well.

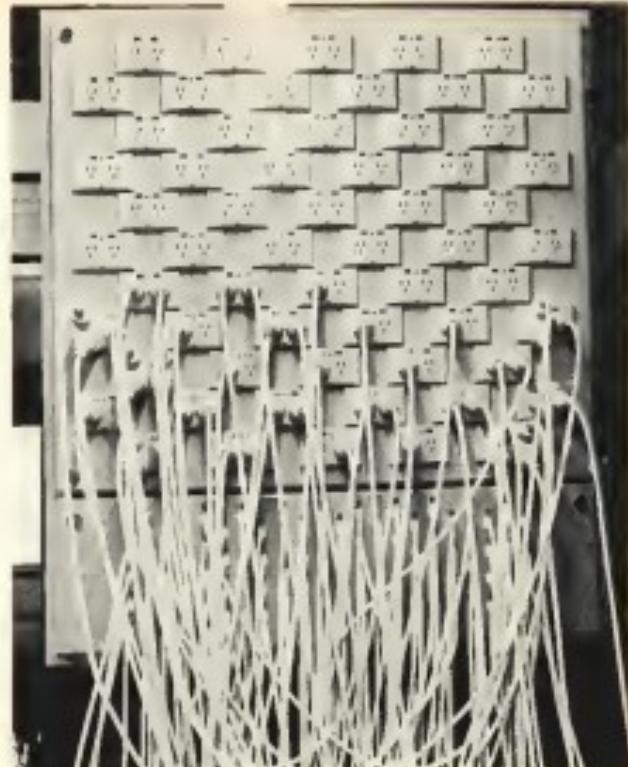
Solutions to these new problems are rarely easy to find, off the shelf, and usually involve long amounts of improvisational time. This article is therefore an inevitable plea for designers to re-design equipment for the alternative theatre stage.

Firstly let us look at **sound equipment**. We need a QUART tape deck, as reliable as the REVOX or PHONOGRAPH but without the relay noise which negate soundproofing of certain room quality to shut them up. These reactors cannot, at present, be used in an audience area. Speaker systems also are an obvious problem for the alternative theatre instead of having permanent balanced speaker systems glued to the proscenium arch, we have the permanent problem of where to place those portable six cubic feet enclosures so that they don't perforate persons' eardrums who happen to be in the immediate vicinity. The other expressive problem is the 15 miles of speaker connecting wires which have been literally tied to the lighting grid over the last four years productions — inevitably left behind when the speakers are shifted yet again to a totally new location. What might perhaps be ideal would be a speaker patch system similar to a lighting patch system which could carry up to say 12 unidirectional but affective speakers on the lighting grid without initial pickup of unwanted thorax buzz. For low budget theatre this could be a couple of speakers and 12 patch points — for the Space in Adelaide it could be 12 BOSE 604s pointing DOWN from three granite caravans.

Which leads to a few comments on lighting and lighting control. The primary factor which affects lighting design on the alternative theatre stage is the requirement to light for audience on at least three sides thus requiring approximately three times the equipment needed to light the same show on the proscenium arch stage.

To get light on any part of the stage area with instant accuracy we need a grid system totally removed from the control of FOH 1, 2 and 3 bars. Basically we agree that a one metre grid is absolutely necessary. We each then put thoughts about the method of hanging such a one metre grid, but we are certainly agreed that the cantilever concept in its present form is both apparently expensive and totally inefficient. It is not good enough to be holding hoses in the woods, cantilevers of brand new flexible fibres in order to be able to position lanterns properly!

An absolutely efficient ceiling with the grid immediately under it is needed at a height of approximately six metres which will stop actors voices vanishing into some vast black void. Access can be obtained to the grid from



Piano Panel Spaghetti I — at the OPEN STAGE Melbourne

a small, clumsy picker, hydraulic hoist which would happily crawl the theatre carrying one person, and about 20 lanterns and is stopped only by floor obstructions such as seating (which can, of course, be easily shifted).

Another method of course is to hire a travelling cantilever (as a travelling crane in a hotel which runs right back into the walls of the theatre) UNDER the grid enabling the person rigging to not go up and down and walk from side to side to reach any point in the theatre than to hang and run the lantern at chest height. Lanterns would be fitted on the handles; the traveller stand would be parked in a slot in the end wall of that theatre when not in use. However, not to have to focus a 264 or an affective projector on your guts in the dust it could breed a whole generation of lighting geeks with normal length arms.

To back up the grid is a comprehensive system of patch panels terminating in a permanent patch panel with mesh indicators to show at a glance whether a power going into the link outlet and therefore whatever that dead one is the lamp or the fuse.

Lastly a sieve in the direction of lighting control. The soundly designed and for practitioners such theatre highly efficient

Sound SP 60-80 series is far too constraining for ready application in the sort of highly mobile theatre of which we are speaking. For the Project, for example, initially motivated by lack of money but subsequently by more realistic concerns with flexibility, we constructed a 20 channel 2 presser board (2K per channel) which has 4 end 8 middle Master blocks on each presser. The ability to isolate any channel and can set be used from a port in the audience. We are at present designing a 40 channel board with the same specifications and because of miniaturisation the physical size should stay within the audience area limitations. It will have a capacity of 26 channels at 2K and 3 at 5K.

The cost of production of the 40 channel board will be approximately \$1,300, including labour costs. Surely there is an electronics manufacturer who can supply comparable deminers in Australia at a reasonable price.

The basic brief of the flexible alternative theatre must surely be that anything is possible for each time a new production is mounted a new theatre is constructed in the shell of the building, a body for the life which is the play.

We must have the ingenuity to supply its life blood.

Opera

AUSTRALIAN OPERA

SYDNEY OPERA SEASON

David Gyger

The days are long gone when it was even remotely apt to describe grand opera as an art form which required all壯ing drama and bawling court for man to nothing. Many of those who even today hear that long dead horse would make the equally drastic mistake of thinking the reverse. That opera is merely drama with incidental music and therefore musical considerations ought always to be subordinate to dramatic credibility.

But audiences are, of course, hardly wrong since it is legitimate art form in its own right and was to the public in the 1930s who lived in sparseness the fact. The theatre-going people are quite right to deny the occasional music-a-will production that still crops up today with all the traditional absurdities — the bit ungrateful singers whose "acting" consists of throwing in a few unconvinced hammed gestures and those of the shamed school girl who never moves anything but a throat muscle; the obsession with tunefulness which passed traditionally, the abhorrence of anything even remotely harsh or off-the-beaten-track. But on the other hand some of the worst opera disasters one could ever fear to hear emanated from those directors — often with sufficient established importance — who produce an opera as if it were divine pure and simple.

The classic bad example is the mythical opera producer who tries to ensure a principal to sing lying flat on his back while smoking a cigarette. It just can't be done. Nor will always permit his piece operatic action as one might like. Musical considerations almost always dictate how fast lines can be delivered and it is a simple fact that one can not sing words comprehensibly as rapidly as one can speak them. Further, the composer lays down the speed at which his music should be performed. Sometimes one can get away with judicious cutting but one can never, say speed up the action by playing the notes as virtuous but twice as fast. Many operas, in particular those of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss are intrinsically worse to be treated — even walloped in — rather than to be dashed through or hauled along so one can catch a brief or brief passing ovation to the resultant in the pit.

Five operas including three productions new to Sydney were performed in the first month of the current four-month, 100-performance season of the Australian Opera at the Sydney Opera House. Only two involve one of works that have sufficient intrinsic merit to have earned themselves unquestioned status in the so-called standard repertory — Verdi's *Arabianische* and Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*. The plot of *Rosenkavalier* may be silly and indecently witty in their come, but it has some of the most popular tunes in all opera and a sure fire heat jolting last act for all but

spontaneously rustled.

But an opening night this year Julie Fricker was still a long way from convincing the regality and the pretensions of the Marquises, a role so masterly created by Rosemary Gascoine in the original. Margot Elton was far from convincing in the difficult tessitura paper dry innocent maidens role of Octavian so definitely created by Yvonne Minton though she sang very well, and Rhodes Bruce a Sophie though dramatically excellent, was neither witty here nor there than Gloris Rivers' original. After a month, all three had improved markedly as had the orchestral realisation of the score.

Only a couple of days into the season, Carlo Felice Offorio proved that Sydney audiences was still capable of distinction by conducting a fine musical performance of *Argentea* starring Raymond Myers in the title role, June Breenhill as Gilda, Reginald Byers as the Duke, Donald Shanks as Scarpafucile and Lesley Stander as Maddalena. But the fruits in John Copley's originally 1972 production do not grow less with repeated viewings, in particular the pedestrian and incongruous neatnesslessness of the opening scene and the involved stances of the second scene that prevents Gilda from running joyously into her father's arms as the music demands, but the famous quartet of the last act has this season for the first time found satisfying realisation with the addition of Miss Stander to the cast.

Far and away the most successful of the three new productions seen during the month is that of Monk's *Adelicia* from the Bangalore producer George Optique and designer Krishna Jayakaran of the South Australian Theatre Company. Unlike many a drama director taking his team in spirit, Optique conceded he was dealing with a three act home

the most dismal. *Rosenkavalier* is admittedly long-winded and excessively static much of the time, but it features some of the most interesting orchestral writing and some of the most gloriously tuneful female voices that have ever been composed — or perhaps the famous aria of the last act.

It is no surprise with this mere revival of *Der Rosenkavalier* a month after opening on the 1972 original produced by Bernd Bentheak designed by Tom Lingwood and conducted by Edward Downes. The fault was partly attributable to Lingwood, tunnel peddlers for his realising and partly to William Flod's conducting which at opening at least was far from as effervescent and tunefulness as was Downes.

But far more of the trouble came because of the differences in casting of the four central characters in that one was played by the same performer who originally sang the role. This was the Bluen Dame Neil Warren Smith, which is even more difficult than it was in 1972. Viscosity, excellent, dismally



Australian Opera: The Cursing Little Queen by Verdi



The Australian Opera's *The Aborigines from the Islands* (Makatea)

not Photo shows with mixed verdicts evidence could be seen of his hand at work it was always clear he was a positive influence and not merely a hindrance like that he would be the side of making things too easy for the singers, thus leaving some space and patches if he left his hand go next time he peckles we spent the result a pity will prove to be superlative.

Ogden's particular success in this *Savoyard* was with David Birrell, as Gurneau who seemed to understand thoroughly the problems on stage and produced a thoroughly comic performance. He and the two women provided the vocal highlights, Joan Cadden in soprano form as Constance and Jane Booth as alto mezzo. Booth, more than starting in fragmentary recitations good humour for her night social delineations. Musically, the production was under the firm yet sensitive control of Carlo Felice Collessi.

Collessi also produced a musically good version of Leos Janácek's *The Cunning Little Vixen* to Sydney last presented earlier in this year in Melbourne, a re-creation by Joachim Mitter of his recent English production (in Glyndebourne) using Rosamund Venables' original costumes. Blanche Mannion's Vixen and Robert Allman's Forester were superbly sung and acted as was Ron Stevens Fox, and on a slightly lower level Ronald David Schmidauer and Dog, but the children in the cast were not effective and it was a mistake to telescope the three acts and group 90 minutes of voice involving just one or an otherwise somewhat hard to grasp work. Despite its ethnologically topical message, the work is probably impossible to stage credibly in the 1970s because of its odd mixture of

animal and human characters and its sometimes quaintly old-fashioned morality, yet it deserves an occasional airing for native and musical sake.

Within the limits imposed by the nature of the work itself, the premiere of Norman Atkinson's new production of *Delibes' Lakmé* on July 10 was a success. Joan Sutherland was vocally sparing and dramatically unassurant at the solo role, of course, but Clifford Drury's production was far on the mark in terms of overall impact — magnificently accompaniment with a richness of tone that extended right through the range.

Horn Weston's Gondoliers was at its best when blinding vocally were Miss Sutherland, at other times Weston was too harsh and forced his acting, worn out. Magenta, however, acquitted herself superbly as Matilda in a little pre-rehearsal warming for her debut at Carmen three weeks later.

Richard Bonynge had the Victorian Sydney Orchestra under excellent control in this localized mostly changing score which was narrated superbly by Gervase Daley's pathetically evocative designs (barely dropping an instance of Oscar's basso). Yet nothing can disguise the innate weaknesses of Lakmé which plot is very thin and wholly inconsequential, and only rarely scored; and there were a few needless production lapses such as a distractingly un Indian bazaar in the second act, apparently unperformed even (as Gondoliers after he was stabbed and the handling of the branch of the bamboo stalks) which required Miss Sutherland to turn falsetto and remove it back into position after the departure of the English intruders.



Australian Opera's *Lakmé*

Books

PICTURES & PLAYS

Helen van der Poorten

The New York Stage, Previous Productions at Photographs, ed. Dovir Appelbaum. Dover Publications Inc., NY 1975. Recommended retail price \$6.95. **Australian Ballet**, by David Formby. Ure Smith, Sydney 1975. Recommended retail price \$6.50. **Currency Lens**, by Edward Gospodinoff, ed. Roger Cawell. Currency Matteson Drama Pty. Ltd., Sydney 1976. Recommended retail price \$4.50.

Considering that the "here today, gone tomorrow" aspect of theatre is the main thing that it has been doing for it is curious how much we like to collect tangible evidence of illusive moments in the theatre. Several recent publications attempt to do this.

One is David Formby's new photographic collection called *Australian Ballet*. Concerned very much with the incipient moment of movement, Formby has photographed both contemporary and classical ballet dancers all over the country for the past two years. The result is a collection of lively photographs. Formby writes us in his introduction that his search for what is usually exciting will sometimes lead him towards what is "relatively uneventful" and that good ballet may be at times of photographic banality. In fact the spectators of Swan Lake and La Bayadere are amongst the duller, while his photographs of more dynamic moments capture the intent of action. The Teller, Bayles, Gammie, Rothko Kippe and Belman's Children of Time almost move.

The body, Formby's main subject, as he includes some visually interesting shots of Belle Victoria. His major recurring theme is that of physical form and formless caused by dance. The photographs of Kotsi's Phasmas and Helpmann's Penitentiary go some way towards explaining why he dedicates his book to those artists who have

suffered least in life from poor engineering in their early dancing.

Dr Robert Helpmann, in his Foreword to *Australian Ballet* decries the standards of contemporary dance criticism, suggesting Formby's photographic approach to the art is a useful substitute for the critic's comment. If so, then there is one major fault with this book: it is in the uncritical, and consequently hagiographic, John Butler gives us an abbreviated, myopic Art and Monksong tells us that to dance together you have to communicate with each other. Hardly illuminating and the comments do not usually enhance the photographs. Formby's reverence for important figures in the dance scene also leads him to err in giving so much space to the Russian dancers, Barishnikov and Makarenko. The photographs of their pas de deux are the best, unfortunately, in the book.

These are inexcusable features of a book, however, which celebrates the dancer in his moment of creative peak. Even the most hardened ballerophile will be moved by the visual beauty of the reproductions themselves.

Stanley Appelbaum sees in his introduction to *The New York Stage* that people have been collecting drawings, paintings and prints of performances since the theatre began. He devotes his book to the work of those more recent recorders, theatrical photographers and reproducers, 146 photographs of New York productions from 1863 to 1939. Theatrical photography at first served the quite unusual purpose of providing publicity shots, so one can forget about buying this book for the study of the photos themselves.

At the \$6 per period roughly spans the decline of the Picture Palace, progression with theatres, Appelbaum has chosen fully-filmed shots of scenes framed by the proscenium. The point of view is limited, so many of the scenes we see — Sherlock Holmes lights his pipe and Moriarty plans for

himself or two-dimensional gesturing caught at the very moment.

In spite of this the book is valuable. One photograph, an inexpensively reproduced sketch for the student of theatre design, the book illustrates the range and limitations of the pictorial stage. The record of changing styles within that stage is also to be found here, and Appelbaum includes most of the major O'Neill productions, from the naturalistic early plays to more experimental and expressionist ones. The sets for *The Emperor Jones* and *Danton's Death* are especially fascinating.

As a source of pleasure the book is adequate as it stands, with its careful dating of the photographs and brief captions about the play, designer and the actors, but as a serious sourcebook for the student it could be more explanatory. The chronological arrangement of the plays is the problem, as one keeps wanting to know more about say the productions of David Belasco and the designs of Lee Simonson. Even so one is grateful for having nearly access to these photographs which have hitherto remained in the Museum of the City of New York.

Cameray Merchant Drama records the theatrical past through a now visual medium issued in their list of the National Theatre Series. Roger Cawell edits *The Currency Lens* from which that publisher derives their name: a comedy written by convict playwright Edward Gospodinoff and produced in 1844. This is without doubt the most beautiful of Currency Merchant's publications as far as '80s' re-coloured reproductions of early Sydney as drawings, caricatures, and edited musical score is a pleasure to behold and read.

Accused of plagiarism, Edward Gospodinoff nevertheless gained the reputation of being the first popular Australian playwright and *The Currency Lens* is still a original. Even though as Professor Cawell admits it is "the next best piece" the play is an amusing mixture. 19th Century comedy with a colonial flavour. Review'd at Jane Street Theatre in 1966, the play revolves around the missian nation that "ain't" Australian girls are sick of men a subject which Cawell observes may offend in 1976.

In its original performances *The Currency Lens* evoked feelings of warm patriotism in the audience, but it is hard to find such excitement in it now. The Shape Isham and Lenly O'Leary must be one of the most tedious of his lot, and the role of the Currency Lens Susan demands verisimilitude unlikely to be found in the amateur groups which might take up this play.

The National Theatre Series is committed to placing our drama in its historical context, and certainly the editor presents a lively picture of Sydney's theatre in the 1840s. His chapter on Edward Gospodinoff and his *Actors* is brief but interesting as a piece of theatrical criticism.



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